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VERSE WRITING

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR COLLEGE
CLASSES AND PRIVATE GUIDANCE

WITH EXERCISES

BY

WILLIAM HERBERT CARRUTH

PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY

WITHDRAWN

New York

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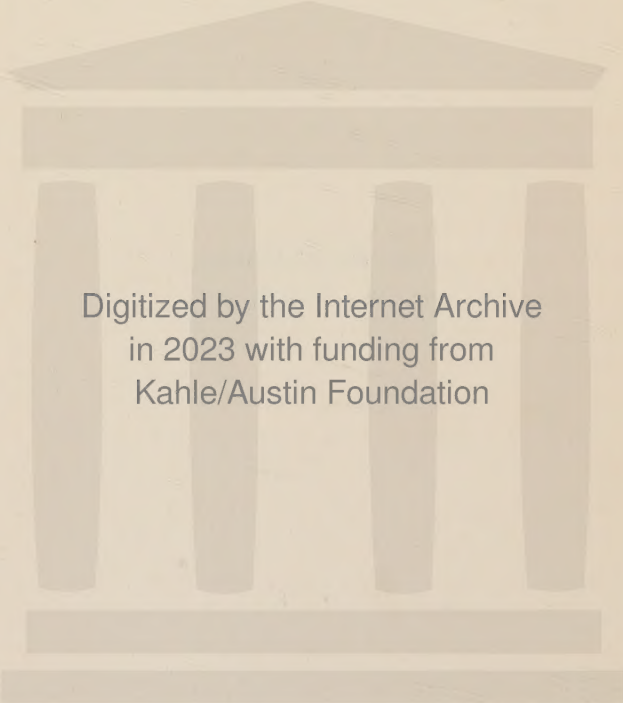
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TO MY BROTHER
C. W. CARRUTH



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Enamored architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt; heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given:
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve and vanish, — take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH.

(The Poems of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Revised
Edition, Houghton Mifflin Co.)

INTRODUCTION

POETRY is certainly not the least of the major arts. Indeed, the opinion has been well supported that it is the greatest. However, it must be admitted that neither music nor painting has suffered such contumely as poetry in these latter days. No one has asserted that the modern world has outlived either painting or music. Yet this has frequently been said of poetry. Poetry has somehow been assumed to be inconsistent with truth and reality. Science, held responsible for much iconoclasm, has been declared to be the mortal enemy of poetry. But why of poetry more than of the other arts?

Of course, it does not follow that these assertions are true. They are made both by the enemies and by the friends of poetry. Those who lack taste may resort to such assertions to justify their own defect. Those who have ideals for poetry may be led to this con-

clusion in despair at seeing no better poetry produced. Certainly it would be difficult to show how or why the spirit of the age should be unfavorable to poetry, yet favorable to music and painting and sculpture.

In our day, and especially in America, there has developed a curious difference between the arts with respect to their cultivation — a difference which seems to have a relative bearing on the esteem in which they are held in the non-professional world.

Poetry is the only art for which no definite preparatory training is deemed necessary or even desirable; at least this seems to be the warrantable inference from our school curriculum. The musician, the painter, the sculptor, must usually go through a long and more or less systematic apprenticeship or novitiate. They find schools and academies established for their better training. Scholastic institutions assimilate their professional discipline to that of the scholar and the scientist. The poet alone is left to feel the way into his art. His is a discredited profession — a profession that does not even claim the name.

This is due in part to the fact that his tool is language, and that training in the use of lan-

guage is supposed to be one of the chief functions of public schools and chairs of rhetoric in colleges. But it is to be observed that training in the use of language is too rarely equivalent to discipline and practice in style. The acquisition of a style in language is as distinct and difficult an art as any other. But while a master like Stevenson spends half his life at developing a good style even in prose, it is a common assumption of the uninitiated that "anybody can write," or that a style is a "knack" to be acquired by a few months' experience in reporting.

Moreover, it should be remembered that there is a technique of versification, which must be superadded to style before the poet is fully equipped with his tools. Style and metrical skill are his colors and his brushes, his chisel and his mallet. In olden times practice and skill in versification were important elements of a humanitarian training, and remain so in the older European schools to this day. English boys still compete for mastery in Latin versification, and among the coveted honors in English secondary schools and colleges are those bestowed upon the writers of the best English poems. Is it not strange that training in the

use of these delicate tools has so largely been given over in our American education? And may we not justly suspect that the discredit into which the art of poetry has fallen among us is due in part, at least, to the neglect of proper training in it, and to the ignoring of the art in our educational system?

True, the ability to make smooth verses does not constitute a poet. Neither does the ability to play an instrument well constitute a musician. Facility in versification may be compared to skill in drawing and a knowledge of the laws of harmony, or of chiaroscuro.

It is the right heart and the fiery soul, the burning love of God and man and beauty, and the irresistible impulse for self-expression which are alone the foundation of the great artist. Without deep and real experiences, first-hand knowledge of life and nature, he cannot hope to speak sincerely and interpret the universe to his fellows.

But when comes the man with the soul of the poet, or the musician, or the artist, it is well if he find himself already familiar with the language in which he must talk, find his tools ready and his hand skilled in their wielding, rather than be obliged to go through a painful

apprenticeship while his inspiration is cooling its heels at the door, to blunder and stutter stupidly in a half-understood tongue, vainly trying to express a divine message.

VERSE WRITING

ADVANTAGES OF PRACTICE IN VERSE WRITING

VERSE composition is only a more refined variety of that fascinating exercise which has for its aim the adaptation of the organ of expression, language, to the needs and aspirations of the human mind. Prose composition is its slower-paced yoke-fellow. Of all the instruments on which the soul may learn to play and by means of which it may communicate its feelings and longings none is so delicate, so supersensual, so alluring as language. While music, painting, and sculpture appeal directly to the senses, they arouse ideas and sentiments only as a secondary result. By means of the arbitrary symbols of words poetry makes its primary appeal directly to the intellect and the emotions. The appeal of poetry to the ear is quite subordinate and belongs perhaps in so far to the realm of music.

Exercises in versification contribute to the general mastery of the language and support

virtues that are desirable in a prose style: brevity of clauses, balance of euphonious sounds, careful discrimination in the shades of words. Indeed, it sometimes happens that a genuine consciousness regarding the qualities of style is developed only with the attempt to use words under the restraints of meter and rhyme. The very diffuseness of prose makes it difficult for the student to concentrate attention on a specific end to be attained in his exercises, so far as style is concerned. His mind is usually occupied with the substance of what he has to say, while the instructor has almost enough to do in caring for punctuation, spelling, and the rules of grammar. Whereas, in mere formal exercises in versification, the theme, or the facts about it, may be minimized while form, niceness, and proportion become the chief features of concern. The very subordination of the rules of grammar sometimes secures them best against violation. Hitching the wagon to a star may be a wise course even in English composition.

The practical gain in control of a prose style and in general appreciation of the niceties of language is far from the highest value of exercise in versification. The discipline of the

esthetic taste, of intellectual judgment, and of spiritual sensitiveness is worth much more. It may, indeed, vary greatly, depending on the spirit of teacher and student, but it is sure to be something; it may be much. The selection of themes, in one case, or the effort to arouse suitable interest in a set theme, in the other, spurs the finer sentiments or tries the adaptability of the sympathy, as the case may be. The concentration of effort on the harmonizing of expression and theme leads to sincere searching of the student's ideas of propriety and beauty as well as of his vocabulary. He shrinks more from vulgarity and caricature. He learns to be at ease in idealization.

But verse writing is not to be thought of as altogether a task, a serious means of improvement. On a very moderate intimacy it becomes a most delightful pastime and source of recreation. Even before the mastery of form has become such as to warrant the student in displaying his product to his friends or to the public, the mere exercise in harmony and rhyme is, if no more, a rational sort of wordplay and gratification for the sense of music. It is comparable to the amateur occupation with the flute or the piano, but has one considerable

advantage over those otherwise blameless pastimes, that it can be pursued without annoyance to others. The attempt to preserve one's impressions of scenery or incidents in the form of verse may not be so sure of clear results as the photographic snapshot, but will occupy more agreeable leisure and may prove a pleasant supplement to the other. The search for rhymes and happy refrains is an agreeable soporific, and even sometimes an anodyne of grief.

And if the skill acquired be coupled with natural talent, with an active imagination, or a ready impromptu faculty, the accomplishment of the graceful improviser of verse, though more rare, is apt to be as welcome as that of the well trained performer on an instrument or of the amateur actor. While accomplishments merely as means of personal popularity are less sought than formerly, as means of conferring pleasure on others they are justly cultivated. Here, too, the writer of "mere verse" will find his reckoning.

But the broadest ground upon which verse composition may be recommended to seekers of culture and self-improvement is as a preparation for keener appreciation of poetry in

general. A practical experience in rhythms and rhymes and all the technique of verse form will add greatly to the ability of the reader of poetry to properly appraise and enjoy it. As with the other arts, intimate knowledge of the laws of form and expression and a trained sense of the finer features of the product surely heighten the enjoyment of the novice and the amateur, even while exposing him to some discomfort in the presence of crude work. And such a one is enabled along the same line to be of service to others as a better qualified interpreter of the beauties of a great art. Both in seeking worthy models for practice and imitation and as a result of the widening of his field of interest, the amateur verse writer is apt to broaden and deepen his acquaintance with the real poets.

Practice in verse writing seems justified, then, for its general influence on the writer's style, for the discipline it brings to higher faculties, as an agreeable pastime and accomplishment, and as a source of keener appreciation of poetry.

“WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT?”

It should go without saying that this question may be asked and answered seriously only in connection with exercise writing. The poet does not ask what he shall write about. He writes because he must express himself. His songs “gush from the heart”; he sings “because he cannot choose but sing.” To be sure, a verse writer who has a market and writes merely to bring something to that market may hunt for themes, and incidentally he may in this way come upon subjects that inspire him to worthy and serious composition. But the amateur who is writing for the sake of practice may very properly ask and receive hints regarding themes.

One of the best methods of finding exercises in meter ready to hand is to seek them in foreign languages. Translation is a challenge to every one who admires the poetry of other languages. The original poem sets the theme and the meter; the translator has only to be

sure that he gets the sense of the original and to try to reproduce the poet's music. The best translation follows the meter of the original. After doing one's best to render a song of Heine or Uhland or Hugo, one may test his success and sometimes discover his weaknesses by comparison with the translation of the same piece made by an experienced verse writer.

Next in economy of effort to translation from verse is the rendition into verse of prose from no matter what language. A simple example is the turning into verse of the Parables of Jesus or the episodes of the Old Testament. This may be done straightforwardly, without comment or interpretation, as in Willis's *Widow of Nain*, or the attempt may be made to modernize, or to cast a side-light on the parable. In the same way interesting themes may be found in the Scriptures of other races, in the Koran, the Talmud, the Vedas. An incident may be told in verse, or an incident may be invented to illustrate or refute a maxim.

The most genuine poetry springs as a rule from the experience of the writer, or at least from his own observation interpreted in the light of his experience. Yet, just as in prose composition, the easiest themes are in the line

of description and narration. The amateur may well be encouraged to write out of his own life, although expression of personal feeling and passion may rightly be reserved for a confident technique and for the privacy of one's journal, or for the sympathy or criticism of intimate friendship.

Descriptions may be undertaken along any line, perhaps the most obvious being descriptions of scenery. The prompting to attack may sometimes be found more ready if the writer assumes the rôle of correspondent, sending to home friends a picture of new or to them unfamiliar scenes. Descriptions of people are more difficult, though to some persons more interesting. Descriptions of simple happenings verge upon narrative. Narration, while no more difficult, will be found as a rule to call for meter and treatment different from those used in pure description.

As a matter of literary history a story, the narration of something done, was probably the theme of the earliest poem, in the form that is called ballad. However, narration is considered less advisable than description for earlier exercise work, not because the treatment is more difficult, but because themes for

narration are less ready to hand. If the amateur has the gift of seeing or inventing accounts of action let him by all means use such themes. As in prose, the ability to tell a story briefly, clearly, dramatically, is enviable and to be cultivated as far as possible. Details of the art of ballad making cannot be offered here, but the amateur should read and observe the old English ballads, as they may be found in Percy's *Reliques*, or in the condensed edition of Child's *English and Scottish Ballads*, as well as the methods of the best writers of short stories in prose.

In narrative as well as in descriptive verse the invention of themes is a more difficult, as it is an essentially higher, feature of the art. It is not to be urged upon beginners, because they will find their faculties sufficiently occupied with the technique of the new form of composition. But whoever has by nature an imagination disposed to create to his hand pictures and actions that tempt to vivid portrayal may well trust to this faculty for his themes and cultivate it along with skill in the means of expression.

All suggestions that look toward programmatic work in verse writing are conditioned,

of course, by the assumption that some sort of uniformity in themes and methods is best adapted to class work. The individual who works by himself may properly enough ignore any of them that seem hampering. The imagination must be depended on in any case for assembling and shaping materials. That other quality of imagination which "sees things," which seems to shape persons and deeds and environment out of the incorporeal air, is rarer and should be welcomed and encouraged by its possessor as well as by his teacher, if he must have one.

Related to the use of the creative imagination is the faculty of satire and caricature. Caricature seems to appeal especially to youth. The disposition to "make fun of" people and things is often a manifestation of awkward self-consciousness, which shrinks from revealing its serious self to strangers. If the amateur verse writer finds himself disposed to write humorous pieces, there is no harm in it, provided the tendency does not become chronic.

CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO COMPOSITION

It is not so easy to make a start in verse as in prose. The student is quite apt to spend more time in pitching upon a theme, or in coming to a decision about his first line, than upon the whole of a four-stanza poem after a beginning is once made. Accordingly, it becomes very desirable to have helpful suggestions on this point, if any such are possible.

In general it is true that verse composition requires more insulation and concentration than ordinary composition in prose. This truth is based on the fact that verse composition requires the coöperation of the esthetic and musical faculties in addition to those employed in ordinary prose work.

How to favor this concentration? Schiller found himself able to work best with his feet in a tub of ice water and his sense of smell titillated by the odor of decaying apples, which he kept in a bureau drawer. The iced foot-bath probably drove the blood to his head and

actually stimulated the brain, although the practice cannot be commended on physiological grounds.

It is a curious fact that the occupation of some one sense seems often favorable to mental concentration. Thus it happens that some people get suggestions while listening to music, others while assisting at church service or public lectures, many again while working with tools. The meditative aspect of the ruminative animal is not the only reason why rumination has become a synonym for reflection. The mild or partial occupation with the one process seems to inhibit other outward impressions and leave the mind free to act spontaneously.

But as a rule silence and detachment, if assisted by will power, are more conducive to thought and original suggestion than any sort of occupation. A quiet nook in study or garden or park or wildwood, and a reasonable time for adjustment to the matter in mind will usually result in some sort of output. Solitary walks or pacing the room will sometimes set the wits to work when other conditions fail. Exhausting exercise or sport never brings immediate results in mental stimulation.

For the attack upon a specific verse form it is quite legitimate, and for beginners may be quite needful, to read several compositions in the prescribed meter. As a rule there need be no fear of resulting imitation so long as the theme to be treated is not represented in what is thus read. But an intensive dwelling on the scansion of at least one typical piece may serve to put the student into the right pace and make it easier to get off upon the right foot.

It is the first step that costs. It may be a wholesome practice to face the question, under a given theme, "~~What is the essence of what I want to say? What expression would I wish to fasten upon my reader?~~" If that can be shaped into the desired meter it will serve as part or all of a final stanza. Other stanzas, as many as required or reasonable, may then be built to lead up to this, on ordinary rhetorical principles of introduction, comparison, contrast.

If this single expression seems to be musical and worth while, it may become a refrain, appearing at the end of each of several stanzas, or a repeat, beginning several stanzas or appearing in slightly modified form in several different stanzas. Of both of these devices Lowell's *The Heritage* furnishes simple examples.

RHYTHM, RHYME, AND STANZA

THE essence of verse construction from its musical side consists in a regular recurrence of some one or more elements of the language used: stress, vowel quality, consonant character, vocabulary, line length and arrangement, phraseology. This is not the place to discuss the origin and nature of the fondness for such balance and recurrence, but only to define the terms used and to give such directions as are conventional for the use of the device.

The regular recurrence of stress or vowel quality is called rhythm, and the grouping of stressed and unstressed, or of long and short syllables, gives rise to the various so-called meters. In classic languages the determining element of rhythm was vowel length. In modern European languages it is stress. In practical composition in English, therefore, rhythm is of the latter sort, although the effect of the place of long and short vowels plays a considerable but less clearly defined part. A

rhythmic unit is called a foot, and the various feet still bear the names used in connection with classic rhythm. Thus a stressed syllable followed by one without stress, for instance the word 'classic,' or the two words 'use of,' constitute what is called a trochaic foot, or, briefly, a trochee. A table of the various metrical feet is given at the beginning of the Exercises.

A line, or verse, in poetry is measured by the number of feet, or (stressed syllables) it contains, and is called accordingly "two stressed," "four stressed," and so on, or by the Greek names for the same: "dimeter," "tetrameter," and so on.

A definite arrangement of a limited number of lines of specific length is called a stanza, especially when repeated.

The regular recurrence of initial sounds is called "alliteration," once a determining feature of Germanic verse, now a rhythmical adornment. The regular recurrence of words at other places than the end of a stanza may be called a repeat. The recurrence of a phrase or a line or two at the end of the stanza is called a refrain.

Rhyme, or end-rhyme, is the regular recurrence of words identical in sound from the last stressed vowel to the end of the line.

The faculty of using rhythmical language is innate in greater or less degree, but, like that for musical utterance, can also be cultivated. A person who has the faculty well developed is said to have an ear for poetry, and depends largely on his ear in composition. The simplest means of cultivating the poetic faculty is the reading aloud of good poetry with due regard for rhythm. An ear thus trained should know when violence is done to rhyme and rhythm, even without any knowledge of technical terms or formulated laws. But an amateur may learn these rather simple rules and compose verse technically correct. Yet it is in the knowledge of how far these rules may be bent and modified, or rather in the fundamental sense of music, that true mastery in verse form is shown.

Perfect rhyme is defined above. Imperfect rhymes are such as give a first impression of being correct, but are not. Of such deviations some are permissible and others not. Moderate variations in the stressed vowel alone are permissible. Thus 'on' and 'won,' 'were' and 'hair' are permissible rhymes. But no deviation in the sounds following the stressed vowel is permissible. Thus 'shame': 'fane,'

'weep thee': 'deeply,' 'linger': 'singer' are not permissible. The last may be called a rhyme to the eye. Identical rhymes are not permissible, even though they appear as parts of different words, as 'least': 'releast,' 'around me': 'surround me.' The rhymes of alternate lines should differ pronouncedly when they differ at all. It is an imperfection musically to alternate the rhymes 'wait': 'bait' with 'betray': 'prey.' In the same case it is not well to have rhymes all ending in nasal sounds, even though the vowels differ, as 'home': 'dome,' with 'beam': 'dream.'

It is less easy to lay down rules about meter. In general a given metrical plan in a first stanza, as a four-line stanza, iambic tetrameter with alternate rhymes, is a promise for the stanzas to come. A deviation from this without recognizable artistic purpose, as failing to rhyme the first and third lines, varying the number of stresses, changing a whole line or more to trochaic or dactylic movement, is an imperfection because it displeases and disappoints the ear of one familiar with correctness in form. It shows that the composer was ignorant or neglectful of the simplest rules of his art.

It should be observed that iambic and anapest feet have a closer affinity than with trochaic and dactylic; they lean forward, while the latter lean backward or stand upright. Hence it is, that a shift is easily made from iambic to anapest, or vice versa, except in the simpler and standard stanza forms, sometimes known in the language of hymnology as 'long,' 'short,' and 'common' meter. Similarly dactylic lines welcome one or more trochaic feet, especially at the end. But a certain amount of shifting even from iambic to trochaic is permissible, and even desirable, on the principle of variation. Thus an iambic line often begins with a trochee, as "Breathes there a man with soul so dead." But trochees cannot be used indiscriminately in an iambic line. "Who to himself never hath said" would be quite intolerable. Here too, a given meter in a stanza is a promise which must, in the spirit if not in the letter, be kept.

Sometimes, by the omission of a first unstressed syllable, a line is made to appear trochaic, as "Life, I know not what thou art," whereas its movement is really iambic, as clearly seen in the following line, "But know that thou and I must part." On the other hand, the fact

that a verse seems to end with an iambus need not conceal the essentially trochaic movement of such lines as "Only waiting till the shadows are a little longer grown." *Hiawatha* is essentially trochaic, and still would be, even if its lines all ended on a stressed syllable, with what are called masculine endings.

The stanza is entirely in the poet's hands. He may make it as long or as short as he pleases, with lines of varying length and intricate arrangement of rhymes. In general the division into stanzas corresponds to that of paragraphs in prose. In reading or singing, also, the stanza marks a breathing spell. For these reasons, and for some others, it is not well to 'run on' the grammatical construction from one stanza to another. It is certainly an imperfection to carry over thus the incidence of a verb upon its object, or to divide a single attributive adjective from its substantive. To some extent and to some ears these objections hold as against 'running on' lines. Metrically the end of a verse means a slight pause, and a sensitive ear is offended if the sense requires the tongue to hasten over the end of the line.

THE POETIC VOCABULARY

THE writer of verse finds that he has not only to move with certain rhythmic motions but also to take a somewhat new attitude toward his native speech. Or rather, he finds that he does these things more or less as a matter of course. This is no more than saying that there is a technique of the art he is learning. And technique is the summary of the practices which the nature of the material and the medium of expression commend, formulated by the experience of the masters of the art.

The rules of rhythm and verse-form in general are comparatively brief and precise. It is not so with the character of what may be called poetic style. As a rule it is expected to be more lofty and more figurative than that of prose. But even this expectation may legitimately be disappointed in accordance with given assumptions. In dramatic poetry, for instance, persons are apt to speak in accordance with their assumed character and degree of culture. And even in lyric expression the

poet may conform his language to any intellectual level and temperamental atmosphere that suit his mood or his purpose.

There is here involved the problem of realism in style. Realism in art means the faithful reproduction of the actual. It is doubtful whether this has ever been attained in the matter of language. Actual spoken language contains more curtailments, contractions, suppressions, inarticulate sounds, implications by gesture than would be believed on any evidence but that of the camera and the dictagraph. No sooner are we under observation than we elevate or conventionalize our speech. The orator speaks "by the book." The poet does the same to an even greater degree. And just as in the versification he profits, if he is wise, by the example of the artists before him, so in the style he will not ignore the more or less conventional diction of his art.

Only, in both features of technique he will endeavor to learn what is fitting to the conditions of his attempted expression. If he wishes to give the impression of realistic utterance — to approximate the actual — he will know why and when he does so, and what elements of speech will produce the desired effect. On the

other hand, in attempting, through lyric utterance, to reproduce in others the mood and feeling that possess himself, he will not hesitate to use whatever media may be calculated to transmit them. Recognizing that passion is never served hot from the heart's cauldron but only warmed over, that speech at best consists of arbitrary symbols, and that the media of expression must often be laid on thick in order to produce a deceiving color of nature, he will not fear to depart from the language of every day in whatever way will serve his end.

Just as in prayer the solemnity of the attempt to feel oneself in contact with divinity prompts to more than common dignity of speech, so the utterance of the soul in any of its sincere and lofty moods calls for the most impressive words at our command. It is not that commonplace things and their symbols are despised, but that there is a suitable time for everything. The hoe and the broom are worthy tools and may be connected with noble devotion to duty, but only a desperate straining after improbable associations will introduce them into a serenade or a threnody. Literary democracy, like social democracy, will recognize real values in all things, but not identical values.

And so the poet may wisely use his best and most serious vocabulary and construction. We are so accustomed to this in the language of poetry that we are commonly not even conscious of the fact that our poetic speech differs from that of every day. The historical present, inversions such as "Gone are the days," "the night wind cold," the so-called 'solemn form' of address by 'thou,' and the corresponding third singular in '-eth,' — these are scarcely to be called archaisms, but only normal poetic language. Although no one uses them in common speech, they are not hobbles to understanding, any more than the classic "Hath he feathers" in the children's game "I have a rooster for sale."

Similarly, there is a considerable stock of words and word forms which seem perfectly normal in poetry but which, nevertheless, without being obsolete or even obsolescent, are not used in daily conversation, nor even in the forum or the lecture-room. Such are: *alack!*, *'t is*, *e'en*, *ere*, *whither*, *whence* and *hither*, *aught*, *yon*, *aye*, *behold*, *spy* (= *see*), *slay*, *list* (= *desire*), *'neath* (for *beneath*), and many more.

Furthermore, the poet may, at his discretion, employ familiar words in unfamiliar relations

in an endeavor to give additional piquancy to his expression, to develop unseen capacities of their root sense, or to win new suggestiveness from an unexpected association. If he goes too far in this way he becomes obscure; if he goes to one side too much he becomes ridiculous. Here, too, reason suggests only that he know what he is about and take his risks with open eyes.

Finally, the poet indulges beyond ordinary speakers, and even orators, in figures of speech. The extent to which he thus indulges is a matter of temperament, although the very nature of his utterance opens the sluice of figures. The various sorts of figures, with rules for their employment, are to be found in rhetorics. But no rules will be final. No part of the writer's style is so fully his own and subject to his own judgment. Only, here as elsewhere, the amateur will do well to keep within bounds, or rather, to question sharply his own violations of the conventional. Marlowe could allow a face to launch a thousand ships, but the amateur will hesitate about it.

POETIC LICENSE

WHEN certain ill-defined liberties in speech are indulged in by the writer or speaker of prose, it is not uncommon to excuse them as examples of 'poetic license.' The thought here seems to be, that the expressions in question are permissible in poetry and are carried over, with this apology, into prose usage. It is as though the speaker said: "If I were a poet I would express it thus, and would not have to explain or defend my language. I borrow the license of the poet." In this way a prose writer indulges in mixed metaphors, as "I interpose my shield against this flood of vituperation," or extreme hyperboles, as "Her voice chimed in with the music of the spheres," or archaisms, as "Methinks his crown is silvering."

By less informed people the same appeal is made sometimes to excuse ungrammatical language, solecisms in scientific fact, anachronisms, or almost any conceivable incongruity, while it is also done sometimes in sport by people who know better.

This application of the phrase arises naturally from the recognition of the fact that the language of the poet is not in all respects that of common speech. The poet is not only more prone to use figurative language than the prose writer, but he forages farther on the borders of all the regions where the imagination finds its food and its symbols; he takes the risk of going where common mortals will be unable or unwilling to follow him. If, in fact, he goes too far, he has blundered, but it is only by such daring that the bounds of expression can be widened. If the realist had his theoretical way there would be no need of the phrase 'poetic license,' because the poet would strive to use only the most common and universal language.

Amateur verse writers sometimes have another understanding of poetic license. They observe not only these differences of the style of the poet from that of everyday speech, but also the individual deviations of the poets from the technical standards of the art of poetry, and think of these as a form of poetic license. There is scarcely a canon of versification which may not be found dislocated if not fractured somewhere in the byways of one or another

rose garden of classic poetry. Indeed, the canons of grammar suffer violence at the same olympic hands, if less frequently and more furtively. In fact, the unpermissible rhymes cited in another chapter are taken from great poets. It would involve too much risk of rebellion in the graded schools to parade the instances in which great poets have made a nominative the subject of an infinitive or a singular verb follow a plural subject.

The simple and natural conclusion from the preceding is that we may not follow the Olympians when they break the laws. It is not the correct understanding of poetic license, that we may do anything that any good poet has done. It is not true that the king can do no wrong. What is true is, that he can do wrong with impunity, — provided he do not go too far.

The reasons why poetic license is not a license to follow any example of any poet are two: Sometimes the great poet deliberately violates a little law in order to obey a greater one; and sometimes the great poet simply forgets, — is careless, is so absorbed in thought that he overlooks his minor technique. In many cases he would have corrected the little defect if he had

noticed it in time. We know this, because many a great poet has done exactly this in succeeding editions of his poems. We have comforting instances of this in the work of Tennyson, one of the greatest masters of poetic technique.

Instances of the way in which the master poet violates a lower law for the sake of a higher are found in the sacrifice of a perfectly uniform meter as, for instance, iambic, for the sake of variety, of interior harmony, or of sense emphasis, substituting now and then a trochee: "Why, if man rot in dreamless ease," "Breathes there a man with soul so dead"; permitting a super-syllable, as "Travail and throes and agonies of the life"; or even, to secure a certain onomatopoetic effect, for the moment overthrowing the metrical scheme almost utterly, as "Running too vehemently to break upon it."

Now, it is true, if we are confident of our fundamental sense of melody and our feeling for relative values, we may do any of these things and still more violent ones. But until we are thus sure, and so long as we are practicing amateurs, it behooves us to learn to follow the lesser laws until their observance becomes second nature. The temptation for the amateur is to violate the law, not because he feels

that he is serving a higher one and is securing a greater effect, but simply because it is easier to be lax than to be strict. Here, as often, the parallel with practice in the other arts holds good. We must first learn the mastery of the fundamental technique.

However, we must not assume that every violation of the lower laws which we find in a good poet is deliberate and defensible. In the attempt to justify bad technique, a deal of foolish illogic and idolatrous cant has been written about the wonderful art of this or that great poet. "That it endures outrage and dolorous days" does not require especial defense; it simply uses the trochee substitution twice, which is permissible if the two do not come together, nor either in the last foot. In poets before the nineteenth century many seeming violations of musical measure are due to older permissible accentuation. But such lines as Browning's "For fashion's sake that deceives nobody," or Shelley's "Nor do I think she designed anything," are indefensible, just as it is for Shelley in the same scene of *The Cenci* to write (Cenci to Beatrice): "Stay I command you," and six lines further in the same speech: "Now get thee to thy chamber." No poet has

a license to offend against the rules of good usage, nor to affront our ears with wholly unmusical numbers, or musical at the cost of outlandish accents. Mastery in poetry, as in all things, is relative. The poet sometimes nods; sometimes he blunders; and sometimes he is lazy.

His license, so far as it transcends that of other speakers, lies in his ability to rate rightly differing values and to choose the higher. But it is an individual liberty, which he uses at his peril. The beginner may follow him safely where he follows the law.

CONGRUITY

THERE is a certain negative virtue in the technique of versification which seems to be best defined as congruity. It is a more rudimentary quality than fitness or appropriateness. It may apply to almost every relation in the poet's work, as that of the theme to the meter, of the meter or the theme to the style, of the style to the character supposed to be speaking or represented, of the language to the time or place assumed, of different features of the language to one another. Congruity demands that there be a reasonable harmony and proportion in such relations. And as incongruity is a fundamental condition of the comic, so its presence in what is meant to be taken seriously is likely to defeat the author's purpose and subject his effort to ridicule or contempt.

Many phases of congruity are obvious or easily explained; in other cases the incongruity is intangible. It makes the reader feel uncomfortable although he may not know why, or

he may declare without being able to give a reason that an expression or a pictorial touch is not in good taste. However, to be congruous in all its parts does not constitute a good poem; it is simply a condition precedent to poetical effects. Incongruities are stumbling-blocks; but their absence does not guarantee a graceful gait or a successful race.

Grammatical errors of the cruder sort are not likely to be found in connection with clear poetic aspirations. The amateur versifier should have achieved syntactical correctness before attempting the new art. But among the primary lessons in this line is the need of learning to use the dignified and archaic forms, if at all, correctly and consistently. 'Thou telleth' is simply incorrect; 'Go thou and tell your tale' is incongruous. 'Thou art the man' in one part of a sonnet and 'Put up your sword' in another part of the same sonnet is still incongruous. 'The beetle boometh' in one line of a stanza would be incongruous with 'the moon comes' in another line of the same stanza or even of the same poem, although many scrupulous critics might overlook it. 'Drave' and 'drove' should not ride in the same carriage. 'Forsooth' must not sit on the same

bench with 'Hello.' 'It's' does not belong to the same set as 't is.' These are the incongruities of word with word.

The congruity of the speaker and the word is another case. King Arthur does not say 'It's'; Jim Bludsoe does not say 't is.' Congruity demands that the language of any speaker in what is assumed to be real speech should be in keeping with his age and time and cultural condition. Galahad would be absurd if he used the language of Parson Wilbur; Hosea Bigelow would fail if he tried to talk like Hamlet. However, it is conventional to use a uniform, dignified style in soliloquies, as representing not the real language but only the thoughts of the speaker. This convention is often challenged, and perhaps with right. Of course the sense of incongruity depends on the information and training of the reader or hearer. Few would take offense at meeting 'bucket' for a tin water vessel in the speech of a New Englander, or 'guess' for think in the mouth of a Londoner. Yet these, too, are incongruous to the mind of the dialect student.

Congruity is violated by anachronisms in history and custom, neither will it permit inconsistencies in botanical ecology. Kansas

prairies may not be decked with buttercups, nor the cardinal sing on California mountain slopes. Goldenrod must not appear in a spring landscape, nor Easter bells in autumn. Brooks do not ripple over the silver sand in Indiana, nor at the bottom of dark canyons.

In a word, things and ideas and phrases which do not naturally or commonly appear together should not appear together in verse, unless the deliberate intent is to shock, surprise, rouse protest or amusement. It is not possible even to enumerate all the varieties of incongruity. The most obvious may be noted, and the amateur learn to avoid them. The incongruity of eating with the knife will offend practically all readers of poetry; but some of us do not recognize the difference between the orange spoon and the coffee spoon, and some do not care whether a cutaway coat is incongruous at an evening reception. There must always be provision made for the liberty of genius, which turns incongruity into a masterpiece.

In the technique of verse itself, congruity requires continuity in meter and in rhyme scheme within one and the same poem, or at least within one and the same stanza. Alternate lines of iambics and dactyls offend even

the least trained ear. The rhyme scheme of a simple stanza is a fashion which, once set, it is bad taste to violate. There is a jolt in turning from "'T is a pretty good-sized punch-bowl" to a following line "We're drinking from to-night." Here, too, experience and confidence will teach the limits of liberty within which deviation and variety will be pleasing rather than offensive. In phraseology parallel expressions should balance in form. "Youthful hearts and lithesome limb" should be either 'heart', or 'limbs.' "Where the bay was deep and bluest" needs revision to an English ear, making it either 'deep and blue' or 'deepest, bluest.' All that is covered by the expression 'choice of words' is concerned with this virtue. Should a bird's 'chirp' be called 'shrill'? May we speak of 'muting' a 'golden jewel,' meaning to stop a voice forever? Is it appropriate to appeal to the God of Love to support our desire for supremacy? Are 'pollywogs' found in 'billows'? And a thousand such other questions more.

MECHANICAL HELPS TO COMPOSITION

THERE is a legend current among the literary laity that poets are born, not made, which is understood to mean that there is something occult about the talent of versification; that if one is so born he lisps in numbers, since the numbers come; that he will have no need to groan and sweat over his measures and his rhymes, but will be able to pull them forth as the conjurer pulls ribbon from the hat. It seems sometimes as though the adepts cultivated this popular belief, or at least tolerated it with complacency, to gain prestige for their profession, as of old priests and medicine men made hocus pocus over the simple knowledge of nature which they employed.

In fact, while some have by nature better musical ears than others, all poets have to work more or less on their technique. And those with the best natural gift are often the ones who take most pains in filing and polishing. The amateur verse writer will gain most in a

general way by ^Preading the best poets and especially by ^Preading them aloud with due regard for the music of their verses. Good poetry can always be read so as to satisfy the ear by its rhythm without offending against the emphasis needed by the sense. The student who has not acquired the habit of doing this should apply to some one who can so read, — not in sing-song on the one hand, nor on the other in the excessive dramatic manner which seems to be ashamed of recognizing the verse form.

A good preparation for a given exercise is to find a piece in the prescribed meter, or better, several such, and read or recite them over and over. This may help to put one in the swing. There is the danger that the resulting exercise may be too nearly imitation of some particular model, but even this is better than to miss the measure altogether. We know that in youth many great poets, carried away by admiration for a great model, have imitated thus. No great harm is done if the debt is recognized and acknowledged.

If a given verse form has been determined upon, the suggestion just made may prove helpful. But a greater problem arises for the amateur when he must pitch his own pipe to

a theme either prescribed or self-selected. Here there are no precise rules. Unfortunately few poets have written accounts of their processes at this point. In some cases the poem grows by accretion around a germ-phrase, which has appealed to the writer as the essence of his thought, or on account of the peculiar haunting effect of its music, just as a pearl is said to grow by accumulations about some grain of irritation in the oyster's stomach. This is probably the case with most refrain-poems, such as those built upon "Forever, never," "Quoth the raven, nevermore," "A heritage it seems to me, A king might wish to hold in fee"; and perhaps with such opening phrases as "Not only around our infancy Doth Heaven with all its splendors lie," "I wandered lonely as a cloud," "Bird of the wilderness," or "One more unfortunate." These phrases give the movement for the whole poem.

It is not possible to declare that a given meter and rhythm is suited only to a given sentiment, or at least, this is possible only within narrow limits. It is a curious fact that English poetry has favored iambic and anapest rhythms as against trochaic and dactylic in a proportion not far from ten to one. It is safe

to say that iambic pentameters seem better adapted to serious and meditative and descriptive work than do trochees, or short-metered iambics. Light sentiments, as a rule, fit themselves to short verses and short stanzas. Cradle-songs and dance-songs fit naturally into trochaic or dactylic rhythms. Serenades and boat-and hunting-songs are set more commonly to such rhythms, or adapt other rhythms to the dactylic movement. For it is to be noted that music normally sets out with the stressed foot first. Yet examples can be found which go counter to even these generalizations. Nevertheless, it may be well to pay some heed to them.

When verse and stanza form have been adopted, the trained ear may be depended upon to keep to the pattern. But the amateur should not hesitate to count his feet. Especially when the sense runs on from verse to verse it is very easy to judge falsely the proper ending of the verse. The Mastersingers, who are the type of the amateur in verse, are represented as timing their poetic accents by the recurrence of the stroke of hammer or shuttle, and reckoning them on tallies. Rhymes, too, must be watched and tested by the very simple rules that limit correctness.

In meeting the emergencies arising from the conflict of direct expression with the limitations of verse two familiar books are helpful: the thesaurus and the rhyming dictionary. Adaptation to meter and rhyme requires versatility in alternative expression. There are several ways of saying almost anything. The ready writer has these at his pen's end. The amateur is helped by a collection of related phrases, classified under general ideas. Such is the thesaurus, a treasure-house for the prose writer as well as for the versifier. Sometimes the negative way of saying a given thing is better than the affirmative. Sometimes the search for a rhyme or a rhythmical synonym reveals a better phrase than the one already in mind. If the sense is suspended in a solution of phrase affinities it attracts to itself the best. After an honest search through one's mental laboratory the thesaurus sometimes saves much time and vexatious attrition.

The same is true, in its way, of the rhyming dictionary. Some poets affect ignorance of the existence of the rhyming dictionary. The expert, to be sure, has an imperfect one in his head. Almost automatically he runs down the alphabet preceding his rhyme syllable. But

the amateur should no more hesitate to consult a rhyming dictionary than the engineer to use a slide rule or the table of logarithms.

The most dangerous pitfall for the amateur verse writer is the temptation to use meaningless phrases to fill out lines, or ill considered substitute phrases, and words and phrases not really to the point, for the sake of rhyme. It is indeed a fearsome quandary when one has said all he meant to say and finds two blank feet, or rather footsteps, yawning between him and the end of the verse. Rescue lies along two lines. There is nearly always some good touch which has not been laid on to the picture, and fortunately the very demand for it sometimes brings out the best feature of the painting. And again, the thing can be said in more ways than one, some longer, some shorter. These modifications may lead to the longer verse and the fitting rhyme. For of all things sense and fitness are not to be sacrificed for the sake of a rhyme. It is in the forced rhyme that the stop-gap is most obvious. Better revise an entire stanza than to admit a rhyme that has forced its way in. In fighting the stop-gap the thesaurus and the rhyming dictionary are important aids.

ORIGINALITY AND INSPIRATION

THE necessity that the beginner in any art is under of following models and patterns conflicts with his normal instinct for being himself and expressing his own ideas and experience. It is unfortunate that one should ever neglect an opportunity to uphold the virtue of originality. But regard for the real interest of the novice, as well as for that of his friends and the public, will justify at least a primary and greater emphasis upon technique. The number of those who feel a call to express themselves "in the mode of verse" without the power of expressing themselves either clearly or pleasingly is very great, — probably much greater in this art than in music or painting because of the wider distribution and accessibility of the tools. An ink-pot, a sheet of paper and a goose quill are within the reach of all.

It is well to consider the practical limitations of originality. The vocabulary itself is given

us; attempts to originate additions to the dictionary are fraught with peril and certainly not to be deliberately made by amateurs. Rhymes go with the vocabulary; the only opportunity for invention here is in the case of rhymes made by word-combination, so-called feminine rhymes of two and three syllables, such as Lowell's "superlative : furl at if," or Byron's "jeopardy : shattered the," and such are rarely successful in connection with serious purpose. The number of possible meters, or stress-units, is limited to the permutations of *a*, *b*, and *a*, *b*, *b*; but in the combination of these into verses great variety is possible. Still it is doubtful whether even here any strictly new form can yet be made. However, freshness of effect is found in the possibly new content of phonetic quality poured into the old molds. If in the verse "The rustic poet praised his native plains" we substitute 'singer' for 'poet', for instance, we alter the sound effect of the line by the loss of one alliterative letter and of one full back vowel, adding a front nasal and a liquid 'r.' Thus the combination of possible rhythms with all the possible sound variations gives an almost infinite variety in a single pentameter

line. The exact phonetic duplicate of any line cannot be made without repeating the line itself, which is plagiarism. In stanza construction there is still a faint possibility of something new, although it seems hardly worth while to search for it. Most of the best poetry of the world has been cast in one of a very small number of familiar stanza forms.

The revolt against the conventionality of these limited metrical molds and stanza forms, as well as against the constraints of rhyme, has led to protests such as that of MacPherson, in his Ossianic flights, of the Storm and Stress poets in Germany, of Whitman and his followers in the middle nineteenth century, and of the free verse cult in France, England and America.

The forms of art are restraints, — there is no denying it; but restraint, condensation, definiteness are desirable qualities in an art product. They must not be permitted, indeed, to choke the life out of the flower that would grow up within them. When this threatens, the artist must rebel. But it should be remembered that the artist is constantly at the point of rebelling against his art and his tools. It is mastery to conquer them and

compel them to work his will. It is well enough for the poet to wreak himself upon his matter in any way he feels impelled. There is no harm in the amateur's experimenting in free verse. But free verse itself is not free from all restraint; it is simply a seeking for new forms. Probably those are best fitted to try its possibilities who have already acquired considerable ease in the old forms. The amateur musician would be quite unfitted to undertake composition without knowledge of harmony and musical forms to direct his natural sense of rhythm and melody. So it is likely to be with the would-be poet who begins his career as a rebel against bonds he has never felt.

Only the matter remains to be considered as possible field for individuality. The artist's material is life; — not absolute life, which we do not know, or cannot express, but life as it is reflected in the glass of his personality. Life is indeed one, and forever repeated; but the individual variations are infinite, and the reconstruction of these variants by a creative imagination would seem to give ample scope for originality.

Yet the artist is constantly haunted by the memory of old images, by the fear of repeating

the figures or the harmonies of his predecessors. He is apt to be possessed by the obligation to discover some new thing. This impulse drives him into one or the other of two less frequented regions: the remote in geography, astronomy, or sociology, and the very near. He hopes to discover the new thing by going where others have never been,—this is romanticism or idealism,—or by seeing what others have failed to see although it lies under their very noses,—this is realism. In both these regions more or less success in the search for original material is still attainable, although what seems new is often discovered on re-handling to be very old. The taste of the public and the literary schools which seek to satisfy it ebb and flow between these shores.

To “see life steadily and see it whole,” and to show it thus to one’s fellows, is certainly a sufficiently high ambition. Undoubtedly, since we live chiefly in the near at hand, it is desirable that we learn to see it as it is. The searcher for originality, then, can scarcely do better than study to see daily life in its true relations.

But the straining after originality may become an unwholesome obsession. It has led great poets into excessive introspection and,

what is worse, into cultivating human relations for the sake of obtaining 'material.' A better way is to trust to the less tangible impulse of inspiration, the irresistible impulse to portray. One who has seen and felt a phase of life which he is impelled to interpret to others, either for his own relief or for their pleasure and enlightenment, cannot go far astray. As to originality, he will be as near to it as he is likely to come, for he has at least first hand, original feeling.

At the same time, one should be slow to claim for his personal reaction to certain limited phases of life that this is life itself. This is the error of false perspective, of looking at one's own interests always through a magnifying glass, at those of others with the naked eye, if at all. This is not seeing life steadily and whole.

THE HIGH CALLING OF THE POET

BECAUSE most of what has been here said has to do with the technique of poetry it must not be inferred that the poet can be a mere mechanic. Various as have been the views regarding the proper spirit and attitude of the poet no one has seriously advocated his being a sordid verse-grinder. The greatest seeming divergence in point of view has arisen over the answer to the question of purpose.

On the one hand it has been maintained that the artist must be absolutely spontaneous, impelled by love of beauty and the irresistible desire to express it; that he must either be wholly unconscious of any audience and the effect of his outpouring upon them, or that he must at most care only to entertain, to share his own pleasure with others. So far as he is a conscious artist he should be aware of the standards and principles of his art, and work solely to satisfy these. This is the doctrine of art for art's sake.

On the other hand it is urged that the artist, since no man can live unto himself alone, must consider the effect of his product upon his fellows; that expression is only rarely and in very limited ways spontaneous, but is largely or chiefly for the sake of communication,—in the case of emotions, for the sake of sharing and for sympathy; that since all, or most, emotion is sooner or later transmuted into conduct, the artist is responsible for the ethical influence of his output, and must accordingly calculate the moral value of his work. This is the doctrine of art for man's sake.

As so often in controversies over esthetic and philosophical matters, it is possible to see that many if not all of the debaters are in essential agreement and only appear to differ by the difference of the emphasis which they lay on one or the other phase of the subject. The propugnator of pure art is aiming to guard against didacticism, the deliberate purpose of preaching and convincing and converting; against mercenariness, the subordination of high ideals to the demands of need or luxury, "wine and flesh and oil"; against mechanicism, the tendency to deal with the technique of an art as depending entirely on set and outward rules.

The defender of art for man's sake is protesting against an art which ignores its responsibility to ultimate human welfare; which assumes that there can be a desirable and worthy beauty in conflict with the highest interests of man; which expects to attain the best expression without regard to the subjects to whom it is addressed.

Accordingly it is not probable that any artist works in utter opposition to either of these points of view, but merely guards himself against the extreme which he denounces. So far as any one might operate wholly from the standpoint of deliberate purpose he would become a hack; so far as any one might work in entire ignorance of, or opposition to, the ethics of life he would be a pervert.

Happily art is itself a purifying and an uplifting force. Even the disciple who enters upon his discipleship with ulterior purposes, as bread and butter, or vainglory, or propagandism, is often lured away from his lower and more selfish aims, and in the rarer atmosphere of an enthusiasm which blends goodness and truth and beauty into one adorable vision, forgets what he set out after and follows the vision, as Galahad followed the vision of the Grail.

And again happily, morality, which is a consciousness of the bonds that hold the race together, cannot be entirely suppressed or forgotten. No man, not even an artist, liveth to himself alone. However he may rage against the restraints of convention, of social standards, of public opinion, and profess to be independent of them, some purpose there must be in all that a man puts forth, some bias due to consideration of his relation to others, some hope of recognition and response.

The tools of the art of poetry are cunning and keen, yet not too delicate to be played with. But he who enters upon the office and name of poet can scarcely take his act too seriously. He paints in colors that cannot fade; he strikes chords which are perpetually resounding; he sits on the tripod of the seer and prophet, and his utterances are shaped in forms that cling to the memory indissolubly. So to reach the human heart is a great responsibility, a solemn joy, a sacred privilege. There is no higher office on earth.

CONDUCT OF A CLASS IN VERSE WRITING

IN many respects the methods of conducting a class in verse writing may wisely be the same as in a course in prose composition. Only on a few points does the author feel moved to make suggestions.

It may be presumed that more personality or temperament will be revealed by the members of a verse-writing class than by those of an ordinary class in prose composition. Prose composition is often a required subject, while verse writing is quite sure to be optional. Accordingly members of the class are apt to need and to appreciate individual treatment, both by reason of this freedom and on the ground of their choice of the subject.

The membership in a verse-writing class should always be small, probably not over twelve. This small number insures closer contact between members as well as with the leader, and at the same time promotes the

frank intimacy which is peculiarly necessary to secure the unhampered expression of personality that should characterize poetry even of the humblest sort. Shyness is inherent in the amateur poet or verse writer, and one of the problems for the leader of such a class is to overcome this and accustom its members to present their productions, or hear them presented, without constraint and overconsciousness.

As a rule first year composition should be a prerequisite to membership in the class. Otherwise considerable diversity in college standing is not an obstacle. With the warning that students who can already shape a fairly correct stanza do not require the course, they need not be turned away, for there are few who will not profit by further practice. Moreover, the student to whom the technique is new sometimes brings to the work a freshness in point of view and a zeal which will offset the superior technique of the others, while there is always a gain in the attrition of minds of varied qualification and attitude.

For the class conference a single period of two hours is better than two periods of an hour each. Every production should be read in

full and discussed as thoroughly as it may require. Often it seems well to read examples from the poets in the form which is set for the day's exercise. Such readings help to pitch the key for the meeting and establish a standard by which the exercises will be unconsciously judged. To do these things requires considerable time; moreover the atmosphere of the conference should seem easy, not hurried.

A classroom with straight rows of seats does not afford in any case the most congenial conditions for the enjoyment of poetry. It is especially unfavorable to verse writing and mutual criticism. If possible a verse-writing class should meet out-of-doors, or at least in a private study and around a table. Stiffness and conventionality must be dispelled. So far as may be, the class should be like a club of friends gathered for common enjoyment and helpful suggestion and criticism. In such surroundings it is easier to draw out the real thought and the serious consideration of even the shy members.

No directions can supply the kindly tact which ought to go with the leadership of such work. One or two precautions may be taken. The verse-writing class may be sought by per-

sons of light weight disposed to take the course as a joke, or by egotists inclined to use it as a personal forum. In enrolling students it is well to emphasize the need of autonomous seriousness, and to give warning that any one who abuses the privileges of the class will be promptly separated from it. Of all places, in a class devoted to verse writing the leader cannot be harassed by flippancy or the necessity for discipline.

As occasion suggests, the exercises brought in on a given day may be read by the writers, while their fellows take notes for comment, or the corrected exercises of the previous day may be read and the comments discussed along with the verses. Now and then an impromptu composition may be ventured upon, necessarily brief.

While there should be no illusion concerning the purposes of the verse-writing class, — the cultivation of taste and the acquisition of technical skill, — it should not be forgotten that students with ambition and real talent will present themselves. What is called for as mere verse may appear as real poetry. For this the leader will naturally be devoutly thankful, and welcome the powers that may outgrow his training.

PREFACE TO THE EXERCISES

SINCE the experiment is young, teachers using these exercises will have to follow their own judgment as to the amount to be assigned. A report, the honesty of which I do not doubt, allowed an average of about four hours to the two pieces in each number. While the time given to actual composition was usually less, much more time than in the case of prose was needed, it seems, to make a start. Accordingly fifteen double exercises have been estimated as a fair allotment for a semester, with two units credit. The instructor who wishes to use the exercises may require more than two pieces to each exercise if he thinks the assignment suggested above too light. As there are thirty exercises, the instructor may follow his judgment in selecting fifteen, or if more units were allotted the subject, say four a week, he might use all thirty.

The set themes here proposed claim no great merit. If the teacher feels moved to suggest

others, he should not hesitate to do so. But the assignment of one free subject along with one set subject will commend itself to experienced teachers. Some students are so much occupied with the technique that they seem quite at a loss to invent a theme on which to practice; while others do well only in subjects they have chosen for themselves. The average result will be fair. In judging work comparatively exercises founded on a common theme give a fairer basis.

EXERCISES

- Equipment:* * Alden's English Verse, Holt & Co.;
 Bright and Miller's English Versification,
 Ginn & Co.;
 Bennett's Rhyming Dictionary, Dutton;
Roget's Thesaurus, DeWolfe Fiske & Co.;
 Palgrave's Golden Treasury, Dodge Publishing Co.;
 Browne's Golden Poems, McClure Publishing Co.;
 Rittenhouse's Little Book of American Poems, Houghton Mifflin Co.;
 Monroe and Henderson's The New Poetry, The Macmillan Co.;
 Sharp's Sonnets of the Nineteenth Century, W. Scott;

Crandall's Representative Sonnets, Houghton Mifflin Co.;

Lockwood's The Sonnet, Houghton Mifflin Co.;

White's Ballades and Rondeaux, W. Scott;

A loose-leaved note-book, 6 x 9.

* The student should have at least one book in each of the above groups.

Notation:

- = Stressed syllable,
- ∪ = Unstressed syllable,
- ∪ = Time for a missing unstressed syllable,
- ∠ = Extra-stressed syllable,
- ∪ — = Iambic meter
- ∪ = Trochaic meter
- — = Spondaic meter
- ∪ ∪ — = Anapest meter
- ∪ — ∪ = Amphibrach meter
- ∪ ∪ = Dactylic meter

} Two-syllabled feet,

} Three-syllabled feet,

Two-stressed, three-stressed, four-stressed, etc. = dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, hexameter, etc.; in notation of rhymes *a*

b

a

b

indicates alternating rhymes of a four-line stanza, and so on, regardless of whether the rhymes are masculine, *i.e.* on a stressed syllable alone, or feminine, *i.e.* on a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable.

EXERCISE I

Write two pieces, each of four four-line stanzas, of the scheme:

u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>

one on An Approaching Storm, True Courage, or The Violet; the other on a theme of your own choice.

Report a few pieces having this measure. Note whether it seems to fit any particular sort of theme.

SPECIMEN

How happy is he born or taught
 That serveth not another's will;
 Whose armor is his honest thought
 And simple truth his utmost skill.

(HENRY WOTTON.)

EXERCISE II

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas each, of the scheme :

u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>

one describing A Christmas Eve, A Parting, or The Chauffeur; the other on your own theme. Note a few pieces having this measure. Try either piece with the second and fourth lines in feminine ending, and note the effect of the variation.

SPECIMEN

It singeth low in every heart,
 We hear it each and all, —
 A song of those who answer not,
 However we may call.

(JOHN W. CHADWICK.)

(It is to be noted that in the New England dialect the 'r' of 'heart' is silent, so that the word affords a fairly good rhyme to 'not'.)

EXERCISE III

Write two pieces of four stanzas each, one on The Coast Range as seen from Stanford University, My Dream, or The Rising Moon; the other on a theme of your own choice, to the meter:

u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>

Try either the first and the third, or the second and the fourth lines with feminine endings, if it seems best. Find a few pieces of this metrical scheme. What is it called in hymnology? If the set theme seems to lead you into lines of different length and different rhyme arrangement, follow the leading and try to explain the alteration.

SPECIMENS

Ay, call it holy ground,
 The soil where first they trod;
 They left unstained what there they found —
 Freedom to worship God.

(MRS. HEMANS.)

(With feminine ending to line 1):

Ye mariners of England,
 That guard our native seas;
 Whose flag has braved a thousand years
 The battle and the breeze.

(CAMPBELL.)

(Lines 1 and 3 ending feminine but unrhymed; line 3 three-stressed):

Be the green grass above me
With showers and dewdrops wet;
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

(CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.)

EXERCISE IV

Write two pieces of eighteen lines each, in six-line stanzas of the following scheme :

u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>c</i>
u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>c</i>

endeavoring to make the last line a refrain, *i.e.* the same in each stanza; one on My Birthplace, My Patriotic Creed, or My Oldest Friend, the other on a theme of your own choice. Let the refrain phrase of the first be “.... the house where I was born.” Bring in a few examples of this stanza.

SPECIMEN

We cannot kindle when we will
 The fire that in the heart resides;
 The spirit bloweth and is still;
 In mystery our soul abides;
 But tasks in hours of insight willed
 Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.
(M. ARNOLD.)

EXERCISE V

Write two pieces of four stanzas each, iambic tetrameters, with masculine endings (same as Exercise 1) but with rhymes *a : a*, *b : b* (couplets), the one on The Trees of the Santa Clara Valley, The Engineer, or My Dearest Hope; the other on an optional theme. Report some poems in this measure, noting their tone, whether light or somber, romantic, reflective, or didactic.

SPECIMEN

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dale and field,
And all the craggy mountain yield.

(MARLOWE.)

EXERCISE VI

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in four-line stanzas of the verse form :

υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	<i>a</i>
υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	<i>a</i>
		υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	<i>b</i>
υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	υ	—	<i>a</i>

one a Meditation on Vanished Days, on War, or A Modern Prophet, the other on a free theme. Try the effect of giving either the rhymed lines or the 'orphan' (the line without a rhyme) feminine endings; also of making the lines tetrameter instead of pentameter. Bring in some examples of this stanza form.

SPECIMENS

I sometimes think that never blows so red
 The rose, as where some buried Cæsar bled;
 That every hyacinth the garden wears
 Dropt in her lap from some once lovely head.

(OMAR-FITZGERALD.)

In leaf and spar, in star and man
 Well might the wise Athenian scan
 The geometric signs of God,
 The measured order of his plan.

(WHITTIER, *adapted.*)

EXERCISE VII

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in four-line stanzas of the form:

u	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
		u	—	u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
				u	—	u	—	<i>b</i>
						u	—	<i>a</i>

one on My Native State, The Autumn Wind, or Lasting Peace; the other on a theme of your own choice. If so disposed, try a light or humorous theme and note whether it seems fitting. Find some good examples of this stanza. If you have begun one of the above themes in the meter suggested and find difficulty in moving, try it in alternately rhymed iambic pentameters, after the fashion of the second specimen below.

SPECIMENS

Behold, we know not anything;
 I can but trust that good shall fall
 At last — far off — at last to all,
 And every winter change to spring.
(TENNYSON.)

Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
 The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.
(GRAY.)

EXERCISE VIII

Write two pieces of four stanzas of four lines each, iambic trimeter with masculine ending, but rhyming only the second and fourth lines, one on A Call to Arms, A Stampede, or An All-day Rain, the other on a free theme. Note whether it makes any difference to arrange the pieces as two-line stanzas with six-stressed lines. Try the effect of an extra unaccented syllable (anacrusis) at the beginning of one or all of the short lines. Repeat a few pieces of this verse scheme.

SPECIMEN

The man of life upright,
Whose guiltless heart is free
From all dishonest deeds,
Or thought of vanity;

That man needs neither towers
Nor armor for defence,
Nor secret vaults to fly
From thunder's violence.

(CAMPION.)

EXERCISE IX

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas each, iambic measure, but with any number of feet you choose other than those already done, varying the number in the different lines and using alternate rhymes and feminine endings whenever you wish; one on A Railway Train, The Quail, or The Last Ditch; the other on your own theme. If in dealing with the train you feel that a different measure is better, try it and give the reason, if you can.

SPECIMENS

The poet in a golden clime was born,
 With golden stars above;
Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
 The love of love.

(TENNYSON.)

Nay — yet it chafes me that I could not bend
 One will; nor tame and tutor with mine eye
That dull, cold-blooded Cæsar. Prythee, friend,
 Where is Mark Antony?

(TENNYSON.)

EXERCISE X

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas each of the scheme

—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u		<i>a</i>
	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u	<i>b</i>
—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u		<i>a</i>
	—	u	—	u	—	u	—	u	<i>b,</i>

one on A Boat Ride, Debt, or The Song of the Cricket; the other on your own theme. Find a few pieces composed in this measure. If you are inclined to give lines two and four masculine ending, do so and try to give reason for your deviation.

SPECIMENS

Leave the hatred, as in ashes
 Fire is left for future burning;
 It will burst in bloodier flashes
 When ye stir it, soon returning.
(SHELLEY.)

(With lines two and four ending masculine):

Part in peace: is day before us,
 Praise his name for life and light;
 Are the shadows lengthening o'er us,
 Bless his care who guards the night.
(SARAH FLOWER ADAMS.)

EXERCISE XI

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas, each of the same meter as in No. 10, but rhyming in couplets, or *a, b : b, a*, one A Dialogue between a Mother and a Child, A Cradle Song, or The Mustang; the other on a free theme. Report some pieces using this measure.

SPECIMENS

We have drunk and we have eaten
Where Egyptian sheaves are beaten;
Tasted Judah's milk and honey
On his mountains bare and sunny.
(BAYARD TAYLOR.)

From this ultimate dim Thule,
By a route obscure and lonely,
Haunted by ill angels only,
I have wandered home but newly.
(POE, *rearranged.*)

EXERCISE XII

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas each, trochaic movement, alternating four- with three- or two-stressed lines, rhyming *a, b : a, b*, or only *b : b*; one A Serenade, The Reply to a Serenade, or The Trout; the other at your will. Note the effect on the stanza of omitting rhymes *a : a*; of giving lines 2 and 4 masculine ending. Repeat some pieces in this measure.

SPECIMENS

Let me set my mournful ditty
To a merry measure;
Thou wilt never come for pity —
Thou wilt come for pleasure.
(Pity then will cut away
Those cruel wings, and thou wilt stay.)
(SHELLEY.)

Now the long, long day is over,
Night is drawing nigh;
Shadows of the restful evening
Steal across the sky.
(BARING-GOULD, *altered*.)

EXERCISE XIII

Write twenty lines of trochaic tetrameter unrhymed on Little Waves among the Rushes, Sifted Sunlight, or Longing; and twenty on a theme of your own choosing. Bring in some examples of the work of others in this measure.

SPECIMEN

These my father sang aforetime,
As he carved his hatchet's handle,
And my mother taught me likewise,
As she turned around her spindle,
When upon the floor, an infant,
At her knees she saw me tumbling.

(KIRBY'S *Translation of the Kalevala*.)

EXERCISE XIV

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in seven-stressed trochaic meter with masculine ending, or feminine if you like, in which the second, fourth, and sixth stressed syllables receive only a subordinate emphasis, graphically thus:

∠ — ∠ — ∠ — ∠ — ∠ — ∠ — ∠

representing a greater stress than —, rhyming *a, b: a, b*, or irregularly if it seems possible. Let the theme of one piece be *An Aeroplane Ride, Rejected, or The Quaking Aspen*; of the other what you will.

SPECIMENS

All the way to fairy-land across the thyme and heather,
 Round a little bank of fern that rustled on the sky,
 Me and stick and bundle, sir, we jogged along together,—
 Changeable the weather? Well — it ain't all pie!
 (ALFRED NOYES.)

Hush! If you remember how we sailed to old Japan,
 Peterkin was with us then, our little brother Peterkin!
 Now we've lost him, so they say; I think the tall thin man
 Must have come and touched him with his curious
 twinkling fan.
 (ALFRED NOYES.)

EXERCISE XV

Write thirty lines of trochaic eight-stressed verse with masculine ending, rhyming couplets, on A Deserter, The Sweatshop, or A Lost Day; or on a theme of your own choosing. Bring in some familiar compositions in this measure. Try to work in a refrain. Do you feel a tendency to reduce the meter to four chief strësses on the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth accented syllables, giving a scheme like this:

— u / u — u / u — u / u — u / u .

Contrast this with the movement of Exercise XIV. Try the effect, if you like, of feminine endings; also of the omission of one or more of the unstressed or sub-stressed syllables.

SPECIMENS

Yet I doubt not, through the ages one increasing purpose
runs,

And the thoughts of men are widened by the process of
the suns.

(TENNYSON.)

For humanity sweeps onward; where to-day the martyr
stands,

On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands.

(LOWELL.)

Beams of noon, like burning lances, through the tree-tops
flash and glisten,

As she stands before her lover, with raised face to look
and listen.

(WHITTIER.)

EXERCISE XVI

Write two pieces of twenty lines each, in seven-stressed iambs, of the scheme

u / u — u / u — u / u — /,

rhyming couplets, one on A Runaway Horse, A Coward, or The Submarine; the other on your own theme. Compare with Nos. 14 and 15. Is the difference only a matter of the unaccented syllable at the beginning in No. 16? In other words, omitting this syllable, has this the feeling of trochaic verse? Report some familiar pieces in this measure.

SPECIMEN

Now glory to the Lord of Hosts, from whom all glories are,
And glory to our sovereign liege, King Henry of Navarre!
(MACAULAY.)

EXERCISE XVII

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in iambic pentameters, rhymed couplets or alternating rhymes, one on California Wild Flowers, True Religion, or War and Peace; the other on your own theme. Try in either the effect of "run-on" lines, *i.e.* of carrying a clause over from one line into the next. Report some familiar verse in this measure.

SPECIMENS

"I am a man and these but beasts, but thou,
Giving these souls, that all were men ere now,
Shalt be a very god, and not a man."

So spake he; but his fingers Orpheus ran
Over the strings, and sighing turned away
From the fair ending of the sunny day.

(MORRIS.)

(This illustrates the running on of the rhyme from one paragraph to the next, as well as of the sense from line to line.)

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

(GRAY.)

EXERCISE XVIII

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in iambic pentameters unrhymed (blank verse), one on Capital Punishment, The Common Soldier, or The Dynamo; one on your own theme. Try here, too, the effect of "run-on" lines. Bring in, or cite, some familiar verse in this form.

SPECIMENS

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan that moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not like the quarry slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon.

(BRYANT.)

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been deposed; some slain in war;
Some haunted by the ghosts they had deposed, —
Some poisoned by their wives; some sleeping killed;
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court.

(SHAKESPEARE.)

And there, that day when the great light of heaven
Burned at his lowest in the rolling year,
On the waste sand by the waste sea they closed.
Nor ever yet had Arthur fought a fight
Like this last, dim, weird battle in the west.

(TENNYSON.)

VERSE WRITING

EXERCISE XIX

Write two pieces of twenty lines each, in four-line stanzas, of the following scheme (anapest 4's and 3's):

υ υ — υ υ — υ υ — υ υ —	<i>a</i>
υ υ — υ υ — υ υ —	<i>b</i>
υ υ — υ υ — υ υ — υ υ	<i>a</i>
υ υ — υ υ — υ υ —	<i>b</i>

one on the Ass's Foal — the Owner's Point of View (Matthew 21: 1-8), The Lure of the Sea, or A Protest against Corrupt Politics; the other on a free theme. Try the effect of reducing the third or fourth foot, or both, in the first and third lines, to iambs; also of omitting the rhymes *a: a*, and regarding the stanza as a two-line stanza in anapest heptameter. Bring some examples of this structure.

SPECIMENS

Death comes with a crawl, or comes with a pounce,
 And whether he's slow or spry,
 It isn't the fact that you're dead that counts,
 But only, how did you die.

(EDMUND VANCE COOKE.)

Then he stared at the child and he laughed aloud, and she
 suddenly turned and fled,
 As he dreamed of enticing her out thro' the ferns to a
 quarry that gapped the hill.

(ALFRED NOYES.)

EXERCISE XX

Write two pieces of four four-line stanzas each in accordance with the following scheme:

υ υ — (υ) υ — υ υ — (υ) υ —	<i>a</i>
υ υ — υ υ — υ υ — υ	<i>b</i>
υ υ — υ υ — (υ) υ — (υ) υ —	<i>a</i>
υ υ — υ υ — υ υ — υ,	<i>b</i>

anapest 4's and 3's alternating, lines two and four with feminine ending, if you like, one on *An Early Morning Run*, or *A Hunt*, or *The Motorcycle*; the other on your own theme. Reduce the anapests freely to iambs, irregularly or in alternate lines, noting the effect. Try the same meter in rhymed couplets, anapest tetrameter.

SPECIMENS

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
 As his corpse to the rampart we hurried;
 Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
 O'er the grave where our hero we buried.
(WOLFE.)

"She is dead," they said to him; "come away;
 Kiss her and leave her! — thy love is clay!"
 They smoothed her tresses of dark brown hair;
 On her forehead of marble they laid it fair.
(E. ARNOLD.)

EXERCISE XXI

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in four-line stanzas, of the scheme :

u	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	<i>a</i>	
	u	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u			<i>b</i>	
u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	—	<i>a</i>
	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u	—	u	/	u			<i>b</i>

one A Workingman's (or -woman's Thoughts about his work, his condition, his opportunities, — what you will); the other a free theme. Try making lines two and four one foot shorter; also giving them a masculine ending. Note whether the tone of the piece seems inclined to vary with these variations in form. Find some examples of such variants.

SPECIMENS

Ho! the young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their
beer today,
After hangin' Danny Deever in the mornin'.

(KIPLING.)

There 's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks low;
There 's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks glittering and low.

(ALFRED NOYES.)

EXERCISE XXII

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in four-line stanzas of the scheme :

—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	a
—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	—			b
—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	a
—	v	v	—	v	v	—	v	v	—			b

(dactylic tetrameter), or with the first and third lines ending in trochees, the second and fourth lines with masculine ending; also perhaps with lines one and three unrhymed; one A Boat Song, The Hobby Horse, or The Rabbit; the other on a free theme. Experiment with substituting trochees for any dactyls but the first in each line; also with an occasional foot consisting of a single stressed syllable, or a whole line of such :

— v — v — v —

the v representing a pause, but no syllable.

SPECIMENS

Oh to be home again, home again, home again!
 Under the apple-boughs down by the mill:
 Mother is calling me, father is calling me,
 Calling me, calling me, calling me still.

(JAMES T. FIELDS.)

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
 Just for a riband to stick in his coat, —
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
 Lost all the others she lets us devote.

(BROWNING.)

EXERCISE XXIII

Write two pieces of sixteen lines each, in four or eight-line stanzas, of the general scheme :

— u u — u u — u —	<i>a</i>
— u u — u u — u —	<i>b</i>
— u u — u u — u u —	<i>a</i>
— u u — u u — u —	<i>b</i>

making the last foot in the last line a repetition of the words of the next to the last; using anacrusis in any line but the first, expanding any but the final trochee to a dactyl, and reducing, if desired, one dactyl in each line to a trochee; one piece A Cradle Song, A Lament, or A Good Bye to Riley; the other on a theme of your own choice. Bring in some examples of this or similar stanzas, noting whether they seem to be limited to certain classes of themes.

SPECIMENS

Slumber and dream in the morning of life,
 Dream of the pathway before thee;
 Let not each hour with sorrow be rife;
 Joy hovers o'er thee, o'er thee.

(German Song.)

Could ye come back to me, Douglas, Douglas!
 In the old likeness that I knew,
 I would be so faithful, so loving, Douglas,
 Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!

(Scotch Song.)

EXERCISE XXIV

Write two pieces of twenty lines each, or one of forty lines, in iambs of irregular length and rhyming *ad libitum*, something like this :

u — u — u —	<i>a</i>
u — u — u — u —	<i>a</i>
u — u — u — u — u —	<i>b</i>
u — u —	<i>d</i>
u — u — u — u — u —	<i>b</i>
u — u — u — u —	<i>c</i>
u — u — u — u —	<i>c</i>
u — u —	<i>d</i>

and so on; one piece on Preparedness (pro or contra), My Creed, or The Strike; if a second theme is needed, your own choice.

SPECIMENS

What was his name? I do not know his name:

I only know he heard God's voice and came;

Brought all he loved across the sea,

To live and work for God — and me;

Felled the ungracious oak,

With horrid toil

Dragged from the soil

The thrice-gnarled roots and stubborn rock.

(E. E. HALE.)

Nothing of Europe here,

Or then, of Europe fronting mornward still,

Ere any names of serf and peer

Could Nature's equal scheme deface

And thwart her genial will;

Here was a type of the true elder race,

And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.

(LOWELL.)

EXERCISE XXV

Write forty or fifty lines of irregular length, without rhyme, without regular meter, but using something of what you conceive to be poetical style, and aiming at producing a certain impression, or picture, or sentiment. Try as themes: The Color Effect of Autumn Leaves, The Trenches, Unemployment, or Capital Punishment.

SPECIMENS

What girl

Now reads in her bosom as clear
As Rebekah read, when she sate
At eve by the palm-shaded well?

Who guards in her breast
As deep, as pellucid a spring
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure?

(M. ARNOLD.)

I never saw any difference
Between playing cards for money
And selling real estate,
Practicing law, banking, or anything else.
For everything is chance.

Nevertheless
Seest thou a man diligent in business?
He shall stand before kings!

(EDGAR LEE MASTERS.)

EXERCISE XXVI

Write two pieces of twenty lines each in dactylic hexameter (so-called trimeter), without rhyme,

— ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ — ◡

one on Jacob's Treatment of Esau (Genesis 25: 27-34), Mothers of Men, or The Sphinx; the other on a free theme. Observe whether the third foot has a tendency to become a trochee, and whether a natural pause is suggested after the third stressed syllable or the third foot. Cite some examples.

SPECIMEN

Pentecost, day of rejoicing, had come; the church of the
village

Gleaming stood in the morning's sheen. On the spire
of the belfrey, etc.

Still stands the forest primeval; but far away from its
shadow,

Side by side, in their nameless graves, the lovers are
sleeping.

(LONGFELLOW.)

EXERCISE XXVII

Write two pieces of two stanzas each, the stanzas consisting of nine lines of iambics, the first eight pentameters and the last a hexameter, rhyming as follows: *a, b : a, b ; b, c : b, c, c*, one on A True Hero, An Inauguration Ceremony, or A Reunion; the other on any theme you choose. Look up the use of this form and the character of the pieces for which it has been employed.

SPECIMEN

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
Last eve in beauty's circle proudly gay;
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
The morn the marshalling in arms, — the day
Battle's magnificently stern array!
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent,
The earth is covered thick with other clay,
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,
Rider and horse — friend, foe — in one red burial blent.
(BYRON.)

[EXERCISE XXVIII]

Write two pieces of fourteen lines each, iambic pentameter, of the rhyme scheme: *a b : a b ; c d : c d ; e f : e f ; g : g* (the Shakespearean sonnet), one on The Eucalyptus, or any other noble tree; the other on a theme of your own choice. Read some favorite pieces of this sort.

SPECIMEN

When to the sessions of sweet, silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste;
Then can I drown an eye unused to flow
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long-since-cancelled woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanished sight;
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I now pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

(SHAKESPEARE.)

EXERCISE XXIX

Write two pieces of fourteen lines each of the rhyme scheme: *a b : b a ; a b : b a ; c d e : c d e* (the Petrarchan sonnet), varying the order of the rhymes in the last six lines (the sestet) if you will, or making them run: *c d : c d : c d*; one on Thomas Jefferson, or any patriot; the other on a theme of your own selection. Bring in a few favorite examples.

SPECIMEN

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he, returning, chide, —
Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?
I fondly ask; — but patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: God doth not need
Either man's work, or His own gifts; who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best; His state
Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest; —
They also serve who only stand and wait.
(MILTON.)

EXERCISE XXX

Write two pieces in iambic tetrameter of the following rhyme scheme :

<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	where the underscoring phrase is repeated, but in plausible connection with its preceding context. This is the Rondeau. Find some specimens and study them.
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>b</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>b</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>c</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>b</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>b</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>a</i>	
<u>u</u> — <u>u</u> —	<i>c</i>	

For one theme use the phrase "When morning breaks," picturing or suggesting in the first eight lines some phase of a night of painful watching, contrasting in the last five lines with a sweet and peaceful morning after a night of rest; or try the theme-phrase "Line upon line," or "Beneath the ice." Follow your own notion in the second piece.

SPECIMEN

It does not pay to struggle so
 And let the blessed present go, —
 To hang wind-swung with hopes and fears
 And long sore-hearted through the years,
 While round our feet heaven's violets grow.
 Our soul's best treasure we bestow

On fame, — for what we do not know;
But cares increase, and graves and tears, —
It does not pay.

Far off the treacherous vistas show
Dim splendors in a golden glow;
Beside us, seen too late, appears
The hateful woman with the shears;
Alas, we struggle on, although
It does not pay.

(WILLIAM HERBERT CARRUTH.)

FINAL EXERCISE AS TEST

Write forty lines in form and subject of your own choosing, one piece or several.

PREFATORY NOTE TO THE SAMPLE EXERCISES

The author is obliged to his students who have consented to the use of their verses in this way. It is thought that reference to these samples with the accompanying comments may afford helpful suggestions to those who have not conducted work in this line. The author does not fancy that his comments are always the wisest that could have been offered. They stand only as examples of the kind of comment he thought necessary and likely to be helpful.

Naturally the samples here given do not in most cases represent the best work of the class. Exercises and portions of exercises technically without fault do not furnish occasion for so much comment. The marginal numbers refer to the exercise themes.

SAMPLE EXERCISES AND COMMENTS

(1) Their songs resound unto the sky :

Yo ho ! for their befuddled mate !

Their songs with half the notes awry

Will sink them with their carnal freight.

There's not a petrel on the spars

Will trill a vibratory note ; etc.

(F. F.)

Comment: Too many 'their's.' Say 'the befuddled mate'; for "them with their" say 'the Roger's (name of the boat) — freight.' "Carnal" doesn't give me a hu-

morous effect, as intended; better 'human,' and lose the attempt at humor. The two lines of the next stanza give a false impression. The construction implies that the petrels are there but will not trill; say: 'To trill its high, prophetic note,' since "vibratory" is not quite what you wanted, but 'vibrant.'

(1) (From a piece on *The First Rain*)

I help Dad shout the cows all in
 Across the hot and crackly field,
 And laugh to see a grin begin
 To spread his face, — his hurt is healed.

* * * * *

— Hurray! to feel the mud again
 Come oozing up between my toes!

(F. F.)

Comment: "A grin — spread his face" seems to me forced beyond the patience of Webster. The second half of that line is a very poor stop-gap. I had to study to guess that it means, 'Dad feels better' (after the breaking of the drought). "Grin begin" is a succession of rhyming sounds at a point in the line where the effect is not good. Moreover, although your boy is a genuine rough-diamond farm boy, it would be well not to let him say "grin" of Dad's smile at this point. Suppose we say 'smile begin' and 'to light his face'? For the last phrase you might say 'Once more he's heeled.' This slang is in keeping with your boy's language, although I dislike to take the responsibility for it. For the sake of keeping your last two lines it is worth while to revise this stanza entirely, if possible. You might substitute 'lane' or 'path' for "field" and work it out that way.

(A single instance) :

— hills,
The famous, rolling, blue Catskills.
(F. F.)

Comment: There is no hovering accent on "Catskills"; you cannot use it as a rhyme for "hills."

(1) *An Approaching Storm*

The dark and threatening clouds piled high,
While vivid lightning sent its flash
Zigzag across the western sky,
To flee the thunder's tardy clash.

Beneath the mother's fluttering wings
The frightened birdlings cowering rest,
While all the furry little things
For shelter scurried to their nest.

The fury of the storm is spent,
The wasted earth is all a-dripping;
The trees and shrubs are torn and bent
From the blast so strong and gripping.

The lark's ecstatic song is heard
In sweetest warble, as if calling
To all the feathered tribes of bird,
"Come out; the rain has ceased its falling."

(A. P.)

Comment: Line 4, "to flee the thunder's clash" is awkward: surely you should write 'crash' for "clash." Line 8, Do they all go to one nest? I think you can adjust this. "Scurried" should be present tense. Line 12, the change to trochees will not do; "gripping" of a blast is bad; the whole line is stop-gap. Get rid of your "drip-

ping"; then you may work out this line in better shape. Line 14, a song "in warble" is awkward; line 15: "feathered tribes" = birds. You cannot say "tribes of bird."

- (2) A gift, sir, to the home for those
 Who've lived a life of sin,
 On whom society's doors close
 And will not let them in.

(F. F.)

Comment: You can scan line 3 only by reducing "society" to three syllables (a dialect pronunciation not called for by the remainder of the stanza) and expanding "doors" to two syllables, which is scarcely permissible. Or, if you give "society" its proper syllables you get a secondary stress on the final -y and leave "doors" wholly unstressed. A little better might be 'Gainst whom the social barriers close,' although this is a bit more bookish. Or say, 'On whom the doors of custom close.' How is that?

- (2) Like conflicts matrimonial
 This stanza has its uses, —
 At best it's rather trivial
 And ends with anacrusis.

(F. F.)

Comment: A clever reply to a question on the effect of using feminine endings for lines 2 and 4.

- (3) And then the fog comes rolling up;
 A curtain white drops like a cover;
 The mist is poured from brimming cup;
 We cannot see, — the play is over.

(J. W. B.)

Comment: This was to be an example of Exercise 3, but fails to satisfy the metrical scheme; it can be compressed into that form, and with advantage to expression. Omit "And then" in line 1; "A curtain—like a cover" gains nothing, by substituting one figure for another, but rather is incongruous. Read 'And drops its grey-white cover'; the omission of 'a' before a specific noun, as in line 3, is not included in the license of the poet. Read for "is poured" 'pours' and insert 'a'; in line 4 read for "We cannot see" 'Lights out!'; — and your stanza comes out:

The fog comes rolling up
And drops its grey-white cover;
The mist pours from a brimming cup;
Lights out! — The play is over.

(J. W. B.)

Comment on sundry isolated lines:

"To mute forever that golden jewel (a voice)." Can you "mute" a "jewel"?

"But he half unheeded the pain." For "unheeded" say 'ignored.'

"He turned from viewing the radiance." We should hardly say "view," which is intense, of "radiance," which is diffuse; perhaps 'facing the radiance'?

"The fort that lay so inexorably beneath him." Certainly you would not use an adverb with "lay." Is a fort 'inexorable' anyway? Perhaps 'invincible'?

"Towards that Gehenna that twists men's souls." Look up Gehenna; it cannot twist a soul. Can anything?

"That jeweled-bosomed enchantress." Too much "-ed"; perhaps 'jewel-bedecked,' or 'jewel-bosomed'?

(3)

Blossom Time

Where soft, white petals cover
 For miles the fair, tilled earth,
 Within their hearts encradling
 The tiny seedling's birth.

(A. P.)

Comment: "Petals — encradling the seedling's birth"; — don't you see it won't do? We can't cradle a birth. It is a stop-gap. Since line 3 is not due to rhyme you might say 'preparing.' However, there is also an objection to "seedling"; a seedling is a young plant; you probably mean by it 'a little seed.' Better reorganize the stanza.

(4)

The hills beneath the autumn sun,
 Wherever I might wander,
 Were not the brown of summer months,
 But looked a shade more somber;
 And a mist hung like the mist of morn
 About the house where I was born.
 And in my soul was weary hate,
 Hate for a life so narrow,
 And the yearning to know another life
 Pierced like the sting of an arrow.
 And I looked down with youthful scorn
 Upon the house where I was born.

(H. R.)

Comment: "Wander: somber" is not a permissible rhyme, but only an assonance. The one little anapest in line 5 of the first stanza does not seem distracting; but those in line 3 of the second stanza and the two dactyls in line 4 violate the metrical plan. These lines may be made to conform thus easily:

‘The yearning for a different life
Pierced like a keen-edged arrow.’

But is your figure good? A yearning for something better, — like a sharp arrow? I think not. For “with — scorn” better ‘in.’

- (4) The autumn, gay with burning leaves
And robust buxom graces,
Sighs with the wind that skirts the sheaves,
And in the mellow night embraces
The mellow moon that soon appears, —
The age-old orb of myriad years.

(J. W. B.)

Comment: A good stanza with a good refrain-line. But how about “skirts the sheaves”? A road ‘skirts’ a field; let the wind ‘shake,’ or ‘lift,’ or ‘sweep’ the sheaves.

- (4) modified.

Last night I saw a darkened room,
I smelled the sickening drugs; the strife
Of steel, the fear, the swelling tear
I felt; I saw the broken man;
I heard the moaning of his wife;
I said that life was death and gloom.

To-day I see the sunshine bright,
And flowers fill that room of rest;
I feel the pride that fathers bide,
I see the mother’s beauty crowned
By the new-born babe upon her breast:
I say that life is growth and light.

(A. P.)

Revision of first of above stanzas: "strife of steel" is rather meaningless here; would apply properly to a clash in battle. "Strife" is evidently used to make the rhyme with "wife." How to get rid of it? One way is here suggested:

Last night within a darkened room
 I smelled the drugs, I saw the knife;
 I felt the fear, the swelling tear;
 I noted well the broken man,
 I heard the moaning of his wife:
 I said that life was death and gloom.

In the second stanza I cannot understand your use of 'bide.' We abide hard things; 'bide' is intransitive; you must rewrite the line.

- (4) These uniforms, whose wearers fear
 And hate in special manner,
 This far-flung, crimson-red frontier,
 This proudly floating banner
 That shows which fist is uppermost, —
 Lord, lovest thou the nations most, —
 Or men?

(G. R.)

Comment: Though unlyrical, there is nevertheless a jarring emphasis in that appended "Or men," which is effective. "In special manner" doesn't seem to say what you mean, which is, I take it, 'to order.' It is hard to get rid of 'manner' without rewriting the stanza. 'These helms whose wearers hate and fear after their prince's manner,' or 'These liveried men, who hate and fear after their prince's manner,' would be a slight improvement. "Which

fist is uppermost" seems not good to me. The fighter is uppermost, not his fist. Perhaps 'foe,' or 'beast' instead of "fist"?

- (6) Each prayer was answered soon; the miser's wealth
Was lost to him, but happiness and health
Replaced his gold. The shepherd of the past
Unhappily marked out his gold in stealth.

But then the two were still dissatisfied;
They moaned their luckless fortune, and they cried
That naught to them but ill the Fates had sent,
And finally they both, despondent, died.

(J. H.)

Comment: "Shepherd of the past" hardly expresses what you mean: 'the shepherd that had been,' which might stand as your wording. "Unhappily" does not mean 'in unhappiness'; better: 'Counted his shekels in unhappy stealth.' "They moaned their luckless fortune" has two defects: one does not "moan," but 'bemoan' a direct object; we may have a 'luckless wight,' but not a "luckless fortune" = 'ill-luck.' I suggest:

'Bemoaned their change of fortune; loudly cried' etc.

- (6) The black man swings his heavy broom
But slowly, and across the room
He pauses by the window, leaning out
To breathe the vagrant Spring's perfume.
The smell of fired brush, the load
Of lumber creaking down the road,
The dogwoods all in bloom, the big
Spring hunt, the horse 'Ole Massa' rode.

(G. R.)

Comment: You are at liberty to make the third line a pentameter, while the others are tetrameters, but you are under an implied promise to have that line of the same length in stanzas otherwise regular. I suspect that you simply did not notice the discrepancy. Easily removed by saying in the first stanza:

‘He stops, and o’er the sill leans out.’

But your second stanza has an identical rhyme in “road: rode.” You might say: ‘The horse “Ole Marse” bestrode,’ though ‘bestrode’ is a bit bookish for the old negro.

- (6) And when, with thoughts half-formed, I came at last
 To know that then my childhood days were past,
 Youth claimed me then with a stern gravity,
 While tears from my first, deep, sad grief fell fast,

* * * * *

Now, though the childish tears will flow no more,
 And I have learned what youth’s first grief was for,
 Ofttimes dry tears of silent grey despair
 Fall while I sit before a closed door.

(H. R.)

Comment: Both “then’s” in lines 2 and 3 are superfluous, evident stop-gaps. ‘All’ for the first “then” would be less obviously stop-gap; ‘realize’ for “know that then” would be better. With a bit of study you could do still better; for instance, cut out “that then” and insert suitable trochaic adjective in ‘childhood’s — days.’ In line 3 cut out “then” and substitute for “stern” ‘growing,’ or a still better word. Line 4 is very unmusical; besides, “sad” is superfluous, — of course ‘grief’ is ‘sad.’

Notice how the last six words require balanced, almost equal, stress. Regular iambic scansion requires stress on "my," which you don't want. The only way to avoid that is to elide the 'my' in scansion and this leaves your line one syllable short. But you still have the line of heavy words. Metrically this would be better: 'While from the first deep grief my tears fell fast.' It might be urged that "first, deep, sad, grief fell fast" would be acceptable, as having a solemn movement in harmony with the sentiment, and suggestive of falling tears. Such irregularities *are* indulged in by the masters. I can only say, my sense of rhythm cannot accept it here.

The second stanza is better than the first. "Grey despair, while I sit before a closéd door" is good, though I wish we could avoid the artificial stress in "closéd." But after all, what *was* youth's grief for? Is there a clear, philosophical answer to that question? "For" is not a very good rhyme to "more," but we might forgive it, if it were just the thing we wanted to say. Is it?

(7) *Nebraska*

Those treeless, trackless plains now hold
 A million happy homes, and grow,
 Where ranged the horse and buffalo,
 The yellow corn and wheat its gold.

(A. P.)

Comment: The trouble is, the plains that hold the homes are not now treeless and trackless. 'Those erst-while trackless plains' would avoid that difficulty. "A million homes" is rather too strong hyperbole; according to common proportions, with 1,400,000 population Nebraska should have about 300,000 homes. If "corn and

wheat" are subject of "grow," how about "its"? Say 'their' if that is what you mean.

- (7) With many snickerings at small
Mistakes, the student choir has sung
An anthem in some foreign tongue, —
Or foreign might have been for all

A listener could understand.
The minister now takes his place,
Assumes his solemn Sunday face,
And gesturing with slim white hand,
He sermonizes upon sin, etc.

(F. F.)

Comment: The 'run on' turns at "small — Mistakes" and "for all — A listener" both go against my taste, but especially the first one. I have tried to formulate some of the limitations on enjambement in English. I admit that the practice must be governed largely by individual taste, but I believe there are some breaks that cannot be used in serious verse. For instance, a single adjective at the end of a line with its noun at the beginning of the next,

" 'T is sad to think that ever good
Americans should want for food";

or a preposition at the end of the line with its object unmodified at the beginning of the next,

"Few the wild things fearless under
Bolts of oft-repeated thunder";

or an adverb at the end of the line with the adjective it limits beginning the next, as

"The nimble antelope was too
Alert; the furtive step he knew,"

etc. To be sure, your verses, like these examples, are not too serious. But do you really think the *In Memoriam* stanza seems to lend itself to such treatment?

(8-19) *The Poet and the Worker*

(From the Russian, aided by a literal rendering together with metrical scheme furnished by a friend, the original being simply trochaic tetrameter catalectic.)

A poet I, and yet
I too have seen the light
Of factory window burned
Against the quenching night.

* * * * * *

No more I vaunt myself,
Before me is the sea
Astir with storm — the storm
Of song I sing with thee.

(G. R.)

Comment: Your original has a six-line stanza; in general it is better to reproduce meter and stanza. You say you found the original meter too much for you. If you mean, you did not like the result, well and good, but here would be your first stanza measured by it:

'Poet I, to live and die,
Poet, yet have seen the light
In the factory windows burn
Constant in the quenching night.'

- (9) 'T is not the wine I love,
Nor sparkling cup;
To make me drunk, drink thou
A dainty sup.

If thy red lips but touch
The foaming bowl,
In one long draft of joy
I'd drink it up.

Oh, who would sober be?
For such a bowl
And such a bearer sweet
I'd sell my soul.

(A. P.: *translation from Agathias.*)

Comment: This is much better than most of your work. It seems to be good for you to be directed in your thought.

- (10) Gray-clad clouds and stagnant air;
Trees like statues; chirping birds
Flying here and everywhere;
Autos hurrying home in herds.

Whistles shriek across the miles
That step aside from paths of sound;
Children on cemented aisles —
In play their shrill cries resound.

The roll of thunder's frightfully plain;
Windows clatter up above, —
"Thomas dear, Lucile my love,
Come right in; it's going to rain."

(H. M.)

Comment: The whole is metrically infirm: you begin with trochees, but line 6 shifts to iambs, as well as lines 8 and 9. Line 8 lacks a syllable even on the iambic basis. Cure this by reading, 'Shrill in play their cries resound,' thus returning to trochees. "Gray-clad clouds," line 1, is alliteration where it should not be; it tangles the tongue. "Autos in herds" is strong even for humorous effect. "That step aside from paths of sound," — What step aside, whistles or miles? Neither have legs. You'll have to doctor that line on your own ground, for it is quite meaningless to me. "Windows clatter up above" comes very unexpectedly after the line before, as though you meant the windows of heaven. Can't you work it over with the idea of the windows being heard even above the roll of thunder? Anyway, you have changed your rhyme scheme in this stanza; 'above' should end the first line and 'plain' the second.

(10) In the current of the Feather

With its waters ever flowing,
We would glide through fields of heather,
Dancing in the winds e'er blowing.

In the summer sun and shower
Learned we things that Nature teaches,
Studies in the willow bower
And on glistening sandy beaches.

All day long the boats were dancing;
Down the rapids they would quiver,
Leaping, bounding, almost prancing,
On the shining Feather River.

(J. H.)

Comment: 'Down the current' is better than "in"; "winds e'er blowing" shows too plainly the stop-gap. "Things that Nature teaches" is awkward; better: 'lessons Nature teaches.' Your last stanza has good movement and no serious defect. (A revision by the writer for line 4 brings: "Where the wanton winds are blowing.")

(10) Not a sound to break the stillness
 Save the paddles' lazy dip,
 Or the intermittent stillness
 Of a wild bird's startled chip.

On the banks the tall trees throwing
 Shadows dark on either side;
 Shapes and fancies dread their showing;
 In the moon's bright wake we ride.

Just to ride! Forever riding
 Would be heaven enough for me;
 Just to glide, forever gliding
 From the river to the sea!

(A. P.)

Comment: "Intermittent shrillness of a chip" is doubly bad. Is a bird's 'chip' to be called "shrill"? Can shrillness be "intermittent"? Would you speak of an occasional shrillness? You mean 'the occasional shrill chip, or chirp,' do you not? Revise the stanza. — "Shapes and fancies dread their showing," — what does it mean? Perhaps 'dread to show themselves'? But why should they? This phrase, forced by the rhyme, will not do. Your last stanza shows how easy it is to make a simple and fairly good one.

- (11) When I played with little brother
 He found a flower, yellow, silky,
 And its juice was white and milky;
 What flower was it? Tell me, mother.

(J. H.)

Comment: Line 2 deviates too much from the intended trochaic meter. It can be harmonized in this way:

‘Playing with me, little brother
 Found a flower, yellow, silky,
 And its juice was white and milky;
 What flower was it? Tell me, mother.’

(11) (From a piece in which a worldly mother is urging her protesting daughter to accept a rich suitor.)

Love! What of love can you relate?
 He is a kind and wealthy man.
 You’d better take him when you can,
 Than have regrets when ’t is too late.

(F. F.)

Comment: “Relate” is evidently a stop-gap rhyme, — unsuited to the connection. An easy improvement: ‘What is this of love you prate?’ ‘’T is’ is less euphonious than ‘it ’s’ in this connection and less suited to the mother’s normal style.

- (14) But the beauty of Tahiti
 Changes to a mystic madness
 When the sun drops like a plummet
 Leaving all to scented moonlight
 And to odorous spice-filled breezes.
 Native voices chanting softly,
 Wafted ’long the shell-strewn roadway,

Break the breathless, night-black silence,
Crooning, clapping to the rhythm
Of some hula-hula dancing.

(J. W. B.)

A good lyric tone. "Drops like a plummet" is good, and easier to defend than Kipling's "Comes up like thunder." "'Long" is a too violent contraction; better 'down the roadway' in any case.

- (18) The road stretched out, a ribbon straight,
And gleamed like shining silver gray,
The surface smooth reflecting back
A moonlit radiance so bright
From low-hung orb in western sky.

(J. W. B.)

Comment: "Like — gray" seems meaningless; better 'in silver gray.' "So" is a weak stop-gap; you can do better, — along the line of 'the yellow moonlight's radiance bright.' "Orb" and "sky" must both have the article, since both are specific, definite. "From the low orb," will help the first. Perhaps it would be better to expand the one line into two, thus giving the articles room.

- (19) 'T was the night before Leap Year, and all thru the
house
The one creature stirring was old Nannie Kraus;
She was up in excitement a-combing her hair,
For she knew by the clock that Leap Year 'd be there
On the morrow, and oh, joyous Nan,
She knew that the rule would be, Catch as catch can.

* * * * *

The color flooded into her thin cheeks, . . .
Murmuring the while a shy maiden's prayer.

(H. M.)

Your meter is clear anapest; line 5 is a foot short; easily cured by repeating "the morrow." The last two lines have almost no anapest movement and must be padded out, as for instance, 'and the color came flooding up into her cheeks'; 'as she murmured the words of a shy maiden's prayer.'

(21) I am weary with the brightness
Of the lawns so pearled, etc.
What is that! — O gentle singer! —
Ere he doth depart, etc.
Sir, I prithee, get thee thither,
O'er the hills and far away.

(G. R.)

Comment: A matter of meter. If we consider the last couplet as your type, and scan it as trochaic tetrameter, the last line catalectic, then the second lines of the couplets preceding are short. But if we regard the type as a single, four-stressed line, stressed as follows:

— u / u — u / u — u / u — u /

trochaic in movement with the first, third and other alternate stresses sub-stressed, with freedom to omit two of the unstressed syllables next before the final stress, then the stanzas are harmonious with variety. Bright and Miller call this "peonic anapest" and apply it to Kipling's "Galley Slave," — quite erroneously, as I think. "But no galley on the water with our galley could com-

pare" has absolutely no anapestic movement; "galley on the" is the typical metrical unit. We may speak of trochees with alternating feet sub-stressed, or else we should include in our list of kinds a meter essentially trochaic but having after each stress three unstressed, or sub-stressed, syllables.

(21) Till thy glorious smile is brighter
Than a rose full blown.

(G. R.)

Comment: A full-blown rose is a doubtful symbol for a lady's face or her smile.

(25) *A Contrast*

The world is sad today,
For all the trees and fields | are clothed
In gray-veiled mists;
The sun has gone, | or perhaps | it has not come,
For e'en the sky | is massed athick with tumbled
clouds,
The light wind passes sighing through the trees
With bowed and reverent heads,
For all the world is sad today.

(J. H.)

Comment: For 'free verse' this is almost too metrical; it fails to give the nervous, moving-picture effect of the best free verse. It may be helped by redividing the lines as suggested by the bars. The thorough-going disciple of free verse is usually an intense realist in phrasing; hence he would condemn the bookish "athick," and the conventional "e'en." In line 7 let us say: 'That bow with

SAMPLE EXERCISES AND COMMENTS III

reverent heads,' since the line, as it is, belongs as an adverb to "passes."

(28)

Mysteries

At dusk, with heads low bent in weariness,
 Grown old in silver sorrowing of mist,
 The hills bow weeping for the sun's distress
 That day must die as none would list
 It do. So, veiled in awe of death and night,
 They lie in sorrow coldly wrapped, till dawn
 Would show them wonders all of light;
 But still their heads are hid, nor mists withdrawn
 Till rosy new-born day has risen heaven-high
 To common manhood such as all may see:
 'T is only then the fearful hills draw nigh
 To serve the Lord of Heaven adoringly:
 E'en so from birth and death men turn away,
 As hills that dread the dusk and dawn of day.

(G. R.)

Comment: You have the first essential of a good sonnet, — a noble thought. In technique much to question. The rhymes '-ness,' 'list' are too nearly alike in sound; the proximity of identical vowels in rhymes 'light' and 'high' is undesirable. Lines 4 and 7 lack a foot each, while line 9 has one too many. "List it do" is rare, if not unprecedented. The verb is properly impersonal; analogy seems to justify a dependent infinitive, but I can find no case of a dependent clause, as here. Better avoid it. I suggest:

'To hear another sweet day's requiem tolled,' making rhyme in line 2 by transposing "grown old." Then revise line 5, perhaps thus:

'Veiled in the awe of death and dismal night.' Revise line 7, which lacks a foot and has the uncalled-for "would show," perhaps thus:

'Reveals the wonders of returning light.' I would like line 8 better thus:

'But still they bow, nor are the mists withdrawn.' Cure line 9 easily by omitting "rosy." The figure of day "risen to common manhood" seems to me strained. In line 14 "as" must be 'like.' The comparison in the final couplet does not seem well chosen.

- (29) Across the crystal evening twilight sky
 I watched the wild birds as they slowly flew
 At dizzy heights across the cloudless blue;
 And where the placid, hidden wood-lakes lie
 I heard the night-birds' weird and distant cry.
 The honey-chaliced flower, jeweled with dew,
 Was fragrant to me. All the world seemed new,
 And each thing seemed the whole to beautify.
 Yes, this was wondrous evening, clothed in light
 Celestial from the glowing sunken sun,
 And thru the woods I heard the wind's cold voice
 Low whispering the call of mystic night;
 For then another weary day was done
 And all the land seemed gladly to rejoice.

(J. H.)

Comment: Formally this is a correct sonnet. A very slight defect is the continuance of long-i sounds in the rhymes from octave to sestet. Lines 4 to 7 are very good. "Each thing" is stiff and it would be well to avoid "seemed" in line 8, since you have it, in all, three times. 'Part' is much better than "thing." Suppose we make

the change, and in line 7 substitute 'was' for "seemed," and begin the line with "To me"? "Sunken" in the connection of line 10 does not sound right. The sun sinks, to be sure, but do we want to speak of 'the sunken sun' as we do of a 'sunken city'? Try 'vanished.' "Gladly" in line 14 is quite redundant. How about 'and all the resting land seemed to rejoice' as an amendment? We are fairly entitled to one more 'seemed,' though I would willingly spare it. Can you?

(29) I wonder if I love you deep and true?

Pure love, I understand, must certain be: —

Now is there certainty 'twixt you and me?

I ask if you I love, — I dream I do,

The while I seem to search for definite clue.

In doubt there is no sign of love's warm plea;

Black doubt would rather mean inconstancy, —

Which shows that love is not between us two.

But would such questions cloud my mind, I ask,

If you were just a person, just a face,

To be with whom would give no lover's joy ?]

I feel that in my heart you have a place,

Because these thoughts of you form daily task;

To lose you would all happiness destroy.

(H. M.)

Your sonnet has on the whole a good form. I wonder if you know that it echoes Shakespeare's sonnets in one respect — the abstract reasoning on love? Line 6 is not so lucid. I take it you mean 'doubt is incompatible with love's warm plea.' The Thesaurus would help you to 'inconsonant,' a good Shakespearean word, — 'Doubt is inconsonant with love's warm plea' does very well. In

line 13 "form daily task" is evidently stop-gap. You mean, "Because my thoughts dwell on you every day." Why not say this, and then shape line 9 to a rhyme? — "I pray," instead of "I ask" is obvious.

- (29) Lately, remembering how since ancient days
 The master-poet lovers have outpoured
 Their heart's high-throbbing songs, and the adored
 Immortalized by amatory praise,
 I sighed, "All has been said; there is no phrase
 Of tenderness unused; there is no chord
 Unchimed, no fancy that has not been stored
 Away in curio-wise for public gaze."
 Last night, beside the star-reflecting lake
 We walked, your beauty's pale serenity
 More lovely than the peaceful night; the ache
 Of my world-weary heart you soothed for me,
 And now I know, I know that I shall make
 New songs to you throughout eternity.

(F. F.)

Comment: In rhyme arrangement, except for the identical rhymes "eternity: serenity," and in balance of parts you have a good sonnet. Certain heavy phrases mar it. I am not sure that I can cure them. It is worth your while to work on them. "Master-poet lovers," "heart's high-throbbing songs," "beauty's pale serenity." In line 4 'in' for 'by' seems better in sound and phrase. "My heart you soothed for me" — too much as if your heart were a thing apart; I should like these two lines better in this shape:

- ‘More soothing than the peaceful night; the ache
 Of my world-weary heart was healed (or stilled) in me.’

Possessives before adjectives with nouns, — that is a thing to avoid in those phrases. 'High, heart-throbbing, (or heart-thrilling) songs'; 'passionate serenity,' or, if you cling to the "pale," 'rosy pale,' or 'lily pale,' as the case may be. Wouldn't 'star-besprinkled' be less prosaic than "star-reflecting"? The point of all this is: In a sonnet one should study and polish every phrase to make it the very best one is capable of expressing.

LIST OF SUBJECTS SUGGESTED FOR EXERCISES IN VERSE

- I. An Approaching Storm, True Courage, The Violet :
Iambic tetrameter, quatrains with alternate
rhymes.
- II. A Christmas Eve, A Parting, The Chauffeur: Iambic
4's and 3's, quatrains with alternate rhymes.
- III. The Coast Range, My Dream, The Rising Moon :
Iambic 3, 3, 4, 3, alternate rhymes.
- IV. My Birthplace, My Patriotic Creed, My Oldest
Friend: Iambic alternate rhymed quatrain
closing with tetrameter, rhymed couplets.
- V. The Trees of the Santa Clara Valley, The Engi-
neer, My Dearest Hope: Iambic tetrameter,
rhymed couplets.
- VI. War, A Modern Prophet, Vanished Days: Iambic
tetrameter or pentameter quatrain rhyming
a, a, b, a.
- VII. My Native State, The Autumn Wind, Lasting
Peace: Iambic tetrameter quatrain rhyming
a, b, b, a; or elegiacs.
- VIII. A Call to Arms, A Stampede, An All-day Rain :
Iambic trimeter quatrain with alternating
rhyme (anacrusis optional).
- IX. A Railway Train, The Quail, The Last Ditch :
Iambic quatrain with alternate rhymes, lines
of varying length.
- X. A Boatrike, Debt, The Song of the Cricket :
Trochaic tetrameter quatrain, rhymes alter-
nating, 2 and 4 masculine if desired.

- XI. A Dialogue between Mother and Child, A Cradle Song, The Mustang: Trochaic tetrameter quatrain, rhyming couplets, or *a, b, b, a*.
- XII. A Serenade, The Reply to a Serenade, The Trout: Trochaic quatrain 4's and 3's, or 4's and 2's with alternate rhymes.
- XIII. Little Waves among the Rushes, Sifted Sunlight, Longing: Trochaic tetrameter unrhymed.
- XIV. An Aëroplane Ride, The Quaking Aspen, Rejected: Trochaic heptameter quatrain, rhymes alternating, 2 and 4 masculine if desired.
- XV. A Deserter, The Sweatshop, A Lost Day: Trochaic octometer, rhyming couplets, masculine endings if desired.
- XVI. A Runaway Horse, The Submarine, A Coward: Iambic heptameter, rhyming couplets, with alternate sub-stress.
- XVII. California Wild Flowers, True Religion, War and Peace: Iambic pentameter couplets.
- XVIII. Capital Punishment, The Common Soldier, The Dynamo: Iambic pentameter unrhymed.
- XIX. The Ass's Foal, The Lure of the Sea, Corrupt Politics: Anapest 4's and 3's with alternate rhymes.
- XX. An Early Run, A Hunt, The Motorcycle: Anapest tetrameter rhyming couplets.
- XXI. A Workingman's Thoughts (about Work, Conditions, Opportunities): Trochaic octometer alternating with hexameter, alternate sub-stress, and alternate rhymes.
- XXII. A Boat Song, The Hobby Horse, The Rabbit: Dactylic tetrameter quatrain with alternate

- rhymes, 2 and 4 masculine, with free substitution of trochees.
- XXIII. A Cradle Song, Good Bye to —, A Lament :
Dactylic 4's and 3's, ending trochaic,
alternate rhymes.
- XXIV. Preparedness, My Creed, The Strike : Iambics
of free length and rhyme scheme.
- XXV. The Trenches, Unemployment, The Color Ef-
fect of Autumn Leaves : Vers libre.
- XXVI. Jacob and Esau, Mothers of Men, The Sphynx :
Dactylic hexameters, unrhymed.
- XXVII. A True Hero, An Inauguration Ceremony, A
Reunion : Iambic 9-line stanza (Spencerian).
- XXVIII. The Eucalyptus (or any noble tree) : Iambic
14-line stanza, Shakespearean sonnet.
- XXIX. Thomas Jefferson (or any patriot) : Iambic
14-line stanza, Petrarchan sonnet.
- XXX. When Morning Breaks, Line upon Line,
Beneath the Ice : Iambic stanza, rondeau.

METERS EMPLOYED IN VARIOUS EXERCISES

- Iambic : I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, XVI, XVII,
XVIII, XXIV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX, XXX.
- Trochaic : X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XXI.
- Anapest : XIX, XX.
- Dactylic : XXII, XXIII, XXVI.
- Vers libre : XXV.

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